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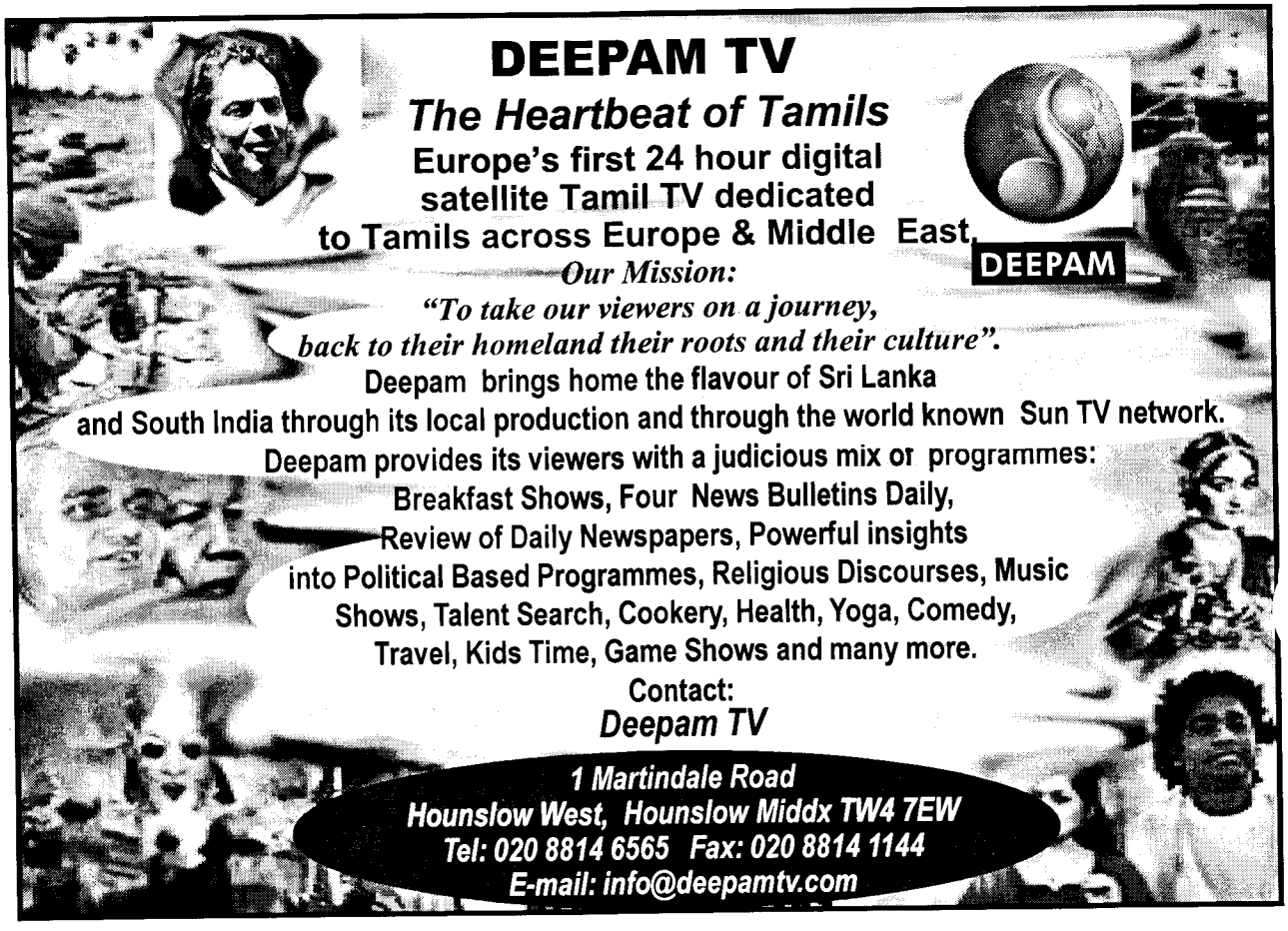

"I do not agree with a word of what you say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it."

-Voltaire

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The Nexus Between Politics and Crime

The recent violent incidents in the rural town of Mawenella that quickly had their fallout in the capital in Maradana powerfully demonstrated the volatile nature of ethnic relations in Sri Lanka. This time round, the incidents involved relations between the country's majority Sinhalese community and the third largest minority, the Muslims.

The original incident at Mawanella did not involve issues of ethnicity or religion. It was a case of some persons belonging to the local mafia demanding 'kapan' (protection money) from a Muslim trader being brutally and violently attacked for refusing to give the demanded sum.

The question is as to how and why that such an incident assumed an ethnic-religious dimension sparking off violent incidents including loss of life and destruction of property.

The incidents reflect a pattern of inaction and complicity on the part of the law enforcement agencies, particularly the police, leading to the belief that they are in league with criminal gangs. At another level, they also manifest the linkage that has sadly developed over the years between known criminal elements and local politicians. This linkage becomes all the more sinister when criminals are known to enjoy political patronage and protection and as a consequence the police not only turn a blind eye to their criminality, but in some cases develop a tendency to become partners in their crimes. The details of the Mawanella incident and its surrounding circumstances bring into sharp focus the sinister and the dangerous nature of this linkage.

On 30 April, two local thugs, known to enjoy the patronage of powerful local politicians, including a Minister, attempted to extort 'protction money' from a bake-house owned by a Muslim. Upon non-compliance, an employee of the shop, Ameer, was forcibly dragged into the town centre, tied to a post and he was cut with a razor in his face and chest. With two policemen present at the scene the thugs challenged the people who had gathered to free the victim if they dared. Ameer's employer, Hisham proceeded to the police station, and on the way he saw a police jeep and directed it to the scene of the incident. Hisham untied Ameer and took him to the hospital. The police failed to take action against the gang of thugs. Next morning, Hisham went to the police station to make a complaint but the police declined to record it. Angered at the police inaction and refusal to entertain any complaint, the Muslims gathered in the town and picketed demanding the arrest of the culprits. Tension mounted and the police did not even an attempt to prevent the attack on the picket by a mob that had descended on the town for this very purpose. In fact there are reliable allegations that the police too had joined in the attack. The general impression that is left behind is that the thugs and the police would not have acted so outrageously if they had not the protection of the politicians.

In the wake of the incidents, the Government imposing curfews, taking such other action as necessary to prevent the further spreading of communal violence to other parts of the country and ordering an impartial inquiry are commendable. Prompt action was called for against errant police officers who failed to perform their duty to uphold law and order. Immediate removal from office of the local politicians and the Minister who have been identified as the patrons of the thugs who were responsible for the Mawanella incidents would have reassured the public of the Government's commitment to good governance and the adherence to the rule of law. What is lamentably lacking is the resolve on the part of the Government to take action against those politicians whose link with criminal elements is commonly and publicly known. Permitting politicians against whom serious accusations of complicity in criminal conduct have been made to continue to hold ministerial or other leading positions in the administration would only serve to further encourage the nexus between politics and crime.

People & Politics

Whither Peace Talks?

The hopes that were rising of an early date for peace talks to begin between the Government and the LTTE have yet to be realised.

The outcome of the five hours of talks on 16-17 May between Norway's special peace envoy Erik Solheim, Jon Westborg the Norwegian Ambassador in Sri Lanka, and an Executive Officer of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry with the leader of the political wing of the LTTE, S P Tamil Chelvam and his colleagues did not produce the expected results as the LTTE remained firm on their three 'pre-requisites' as preconditions for the start of peace talks. The pre-requisites are, the lifting of what the LTTE calls 'removing the economic blockade of the Tamil areas of the north-east, the declaration of a formal ceasefire, and the lifting of the ban imposed on the LTTE by the Government.

Of these "pre-requisites", the Government's response appears to be amenable to the first two. Having denied that there ever was an "economic embargo", the Government lifted the restriction on the transport of 24 items to the north. But the LTTE wants a total lifting of restrictions, including items such as fuel and cement. However, there are indications that the dispute on this issue is not insuperable. Even on the issue of a formal cessation of hostilities, the Government having initially proposed a time-bound bilateral cessation of hostilities, the signs are that it is ready to give in.

The major hurdle appears to be the insistence on lifting the ban on the LTTE on which the Government appears not prepared to give in. There are those who urge the LTTE not to insist on its demand for de-proscription as a precondition for talks, and there are others who want the Government to suspend the ban for a temporary period, a course action which may not be acceptable to the LTTE.

A statement issued by a group of well known human rights and peace activists said in a recent statement, "As peace initiatives relating to internal armed conflicts elsewhere have shown us, the de-proscription of an anti-State movement inevitably takes place with advances made at the negotiation table. In this, the LTTE has the primary responsibility to ensure that the issue of the ban is treated as a negotiable demand, along with other political and humanitarian demands, and not as a non-negotiable pre-condition for commencement of peace talks." The signatories to this statement are Sunila Abeysekera, Sunanda Deshapriya, Rohan Edirisinha, Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu and Javid Yusuf.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the insistence by the LTTE on this demand can turn out to be the biggest obstacle to the progress of the peace process. The thinking behind the LTTE's strategy of putting forward this demand is made clear by its statement issued following Tamil Chelvan's meeting with the Norwegians on 16 May: " .....we wish to enter political negotiations with Sri Lanka as the authentic, legitimate representatives of our people for which the proscription on our organisation should be lifted.... The international community should understand that we cannot participate in peace talks as an illegal, criminal entity with a distorted false label as 'terrorists' .... It is the collective aspiration of our people that the ban on our liberation organisation should be lifted. If Sri Lanka wants peace and a permanent resolution of the ethnic conflict, it should not hesitate to remove the ban as the Tamil people's demand."

The different elements contained in this one demand which the LTTE regards as absolutely essential for participation in peace talks can be dissected as follows:

(a) LTTE is the authentic and legitimate representative of the Tamils, and therefore recognised and treated as such;
(b) The Sri Lankan government should lift the ban imposed on the LTTE;
(c) The demand for the lifting of the ban on the LTTE is the 'collective aspiration of the Tamil people;
(d) If Sri Lanka wants peace and resolution of the ethnic conflict, it should treat the demand for lifting the ban as a demand by the Tamil people as a whole, and should therefore not hesitate to remove the ban;

The international community should understand that the LTTE would not participate in peace talks as an illegal, criminal entity falsely labelled as 'terrorists', and hence the ban imposed in countries such as India, USA and the United Kingdom should also be lifted.

The *Tamil Guardian* published from London in its editorial (16 May) made the LTTE's position perfectly clear on this issue: "The LTTE is unequivocal, as it has been for years: Sri Lanka's ban precludes the movement's legal recognition as the representative of the Tamils. But whilst on one hand, the matter is a technical one - an agreement with an illegal entity isn't worth the paper it is written on - the matter has assumed different dimensions amongst the Tamil people. .... The bans on the movement by India, the United States and particularly the United Kingdom were therefore humiliating and offensive.... Those disparate elements that are now urging the LTTE not to make the ban 'a condition' for talks display a profound lack of understanding on the fundamentals of the Tamil question. So do those who suggest this is a matter that can be resolved in the fullness of time. The Tamil cause is fundamentally a demand for recognition. Addressing their grievances can thus only begin with the lifting of the ban on their representatives."

It seems clear the LTTE strategy is that at the same time as pressing the demand for the lifting the ban in Sri Lanka as a precondition for participation in peace talks, the LTTE is also linking the issue of lifting its proscription in countries like India, USA and the UK. It is this linkage that has prompted certain sections in the media, including editors and commentators, to claim that the LTTE is trying to use the peace talks as a ploy to secure its proscription lifted in the USA and United Kingdom.

While the debate about the pros and cons of lifting the ban on the LTTE is continuing, it would seem that the Norwegian shuttle diplomacy had made some progress. It also became evident that the Government has recognised an enhanced role for Norway in the peace process. A Government press release issued on 9 May said, "Foreign Minis-

ter Lakshman Kadirgamar in a letter to Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorbjorn Jagland recalls that the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE have stated that "they share the overall objective of finding a negotiated political solution to the ongoing armed conflict that has plagued Sri Lanka for almost two decades", and that "The Norwegian Government is requested to take such new initiatives as might be required for this purpose to which end the Government of Sri Lanka will extend its fullest support," Recalling that the Norwegian Government accepted this responsibility and designated Mr.Erik Solheim and Ambassador Jon Westborg to assist the parties to come together to commence negotiations, the Foreign Minister stated that "the indefatigable endeavours of these two gentlemen and their associated efforts towards that end have earned the deep appreciation of the Government of Sri Lanka".

The Minister's letter stated that "in pursuance of the said objective" the parties had decided to take measures to alleviate any hardships and dangers to civilians affected by the ongoing conflict, and contribute to building understanding and a foundation on which negotiations can take place.

These measures are to be embodied in a document, which will contain certain humanitarian measures, which have been the subject of much discussion between the representatives of the Norwegian Government and the parties. The letter outlines the matters on which agreement has been reached."

"In view of the fruitful work done by all concerned towards getting the process of direct political negotiations moving, Foreign Minister Kadirgamar, on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka, requests the Norwegian Government to renew urgently the most commendable efforts that have already been made by its representatives to keep the peace process moving.

Accordingly, the Norwegian Government is requested to take such new initiatives as might required for this purpose to which end the Government of Sri Lanka will extend its fullest support."

The LTTE in a statement issued on 11 May, denying the Foreign Minister's claim that an agreement had been reached between the parties said, "We are still discussing several issues but these discussions have not yet been formalised and finalised into an agreement between the parties in conflict. It is premature and irresponsible on the part of the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry to falsely project to the world media that an agreement has been reached.

However, the acknowledging the progress made, the LTTE said, "We wish to state that substantial progress has been made on the Norwegian proposal of the 'Memorandum of Understanding' after intense discussions for a considerable time with the Norwegian facilitators. This Norwegian project, which calls for goodwill measures of mutual reciprocity, aims at de-escalation of the conflict and the creation of a congenial atmosphere conducive for talks. We hope an agreement can be reached soon on the Norwegian proposal after further discussions and clarifications on certain matters."

The Royal Norwegian Embassy in Colombo confirming the LTTE's position said "there is no overall agreement between the parties in the Sri Lankan conflict, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has stated in response to media reports from Sri Lanka."

What prompted intense speculation in diplomatic and political circles was the request by the Foreign Minister to the Norwegian government "to take such new initiatives as might be required for this purpose to which the Government of Sri Lanka will extend its fullest support", which was regarded as up-grading of Norway's role in the peace process.

Asked about the Minister's reference to 'new initiatives' to be taken by the Norwegians, Kethesh Loganathan of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) and a member of the Peace Support Group (PSG) was quoted as saying: "This could well be a public acknowledgement by the Government of the inevitable up-grading of, Norway's role from that of a facilitator to a more pro-active role approximating that of a mediator. In any case the term 'fresh initiatives' indicates recognition by the Government of the need for considerable flexibility by Norway, if it is to play an effective role," adding that "If that is what was intended in the press release of the Foreign Ministry, then it could also serve to reconcile the gap in perceptions by the Government and the LTTE as regards Norway's future role in the peace process".

The indications are that if the peace process is to be taken forward, the Norwegians have to take new and many more initiatives.

● No Confidence Motion

The UNP leadership, under pressure from its "Reformist Group" led by the party's deputy leader, Karu Jayasuriya, has now decided to move motions of no confidence against the Government and the Chief Justice. As for the impeachment motion against the Chief Justice, which is spearheaded by the Sinhala weekly 'Ravaya' Editor, Victor Ivan, who appears to be playing an increasingly significant role in the internal factional fighting within the party, the UNP as a political party stands little to gain politically. It would seem that many senior UNP lawyers have advised against this move. The Bar Association(BA) itself has already voiced strong opposition to the continuing campaign against the Chief Justice in the Ravaya. Dragging the head of the judiciary into the quagmire of partisan political vulgar and vindictive debate in parliament is not what the BA does want to take place.

As for the no confidence motion against the Government, there appears little chance of success if the constituent parties of the Peoples Alliance stand together. Even if all MPs presently constituting the opposition belonging to the UNP, JVP and all MP belonging to the Tamil parties like TULF, TELO and Tamil Congress combine together, it would not produce the numbers required to get the no confidence motion through parliament. The ruling PA coalition enjoys the support of only 116 members in the Parliament of 225 MPs, while the combined opposition can only muster the support of 108 MPs (UNP-87 (excluding the Speaker, Anura Bandaranaike); JVP -10; TULF - 5; TELO - 3; ACTC – 1; SU(Sihala Urumaya)-1. That is why the UNP leadership has been and is trying hard to instigate defections from within the PA ranks. With all sort of promises being offered, particular pressure is being applied on the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress(SLMC) and the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) led by cabinet minister Arumugam Thondaman to defect and vote against the Government when the no

confidence motion is presented to parliament. Even if these parties defect, the numbers would not be sufficient, and therefore if the motion is to succeed, some more MPs from the governing party should be 'bought over

What is to happen if the no confidence against the Government succeeds? Mrs Kumaratunga will continue in office as the elected President. But will the UNP be in a position to mobilise a majority in parliament to form a Government? It is one thing to combine together on a no confidence motion against the 'common enemy' – the Government and bring it down. But will the JVP, TULF and other Tamil parties now in parliament join the UNP in forming a coalition Government? It is unlikely that the 'Marxist' JVP help to form a 'capitalist' UNP-led government? What is it in for the Tamil parties to help the UNP to form a Government? What is the price that the UNP leadership will be prepared to pay for securing the support of these parties? These questions may fall into the realm of speculation, but they will turn out to be real if, as fondly hoped by the UNP, the no confidence motion succeeds.

More significantly, what will happen to the ongoing Norwegian facilitated peace process? The UNP leadership is on record as promising to the TULF, in return for its support for the no confidence motion against the Government that it would continue with the Norwegian effort. But the fact is that, not only many leading members of the UNP's Reformist Group have expressed reservations about the peace process, but also the JVP has publicly and continuously denounced Norway's role as facilitator. Its leaders rejected an invitation from Erik Solheim for meeting questioning Norway's and his impartiality. The latest issue of the '*Lakbima*' quoted JVP General Secretary Mr. Tilvin Silva as saying: "The manner in which Erik Solheim is running all over the world to get the proscription on LTTE lifted, after misleading the Sri Lankan government initially that the LTTE is willing to have peace talks without any conditions, clearly indicate that Solheim is nothing but a stooge of the LTTE. Mr. Silva also added that even Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake and the likes who spear headed the campaign to get the LTTE internationally proscribed, is now working hard to get it de-proscribed, proving beyond doubt that from the beginning the government too have fooled people. He also said that if by any chance the LTTE were de-proscribed in Sri Lanka, the Tigers would immediately appeal against proscriptions imposed on them internationally. In such a background the role played by Solheim from the beginning exposes him for what he is, a pawn sent by the capitalists to strengthen the hand of the LTTE." This being the position of the JVP, will it help to sustain a UNP-led government if it were keep its promise to the TULF to continue with the Norwegian facilitated peace process? The answer to question must be plainly obvious.

● Caretaker Government?

It is reported that the opposition parties comprising the UNP, JVP, TULF and ACTC have decided to present their combined proposals for amending the constitution to Parliament next month. The proposals would include provision for the appointment of four independent commissions for the Judiciary, Police, Civil Service and Election proposed by the UNP and provision for the setting up of a caretaker government to hold general and presidential elections and a State Media Commission proposed by the JVP. The parties agreed that the UNP would draft the necessary legislation for a final discussion before presentation to parliament in early June.

It has to be noted for the record that the proposal for the setting up of a "caretaker government" is not a novel one coming from the JVP. When, following the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987, the country and the government of the day was held to ransom by the unmitigated violence, terror and innumerable assassinations of political leaders, trade unionists, student activists, and academics including university vice chancellors, it should be recalled that the JVP, then under the leadership of Rohana Wijeweera, through its then mediator, surprise surprise, Rev. Maduluweva Sobitha Thero, conveyed the message from the JVP at a meeting with the then President Premadasa that a caretaker government of the type it is proposing now should be formed as a pre-condition for ending its campaign terror and violence. Of course Premadasa did not accede to the JVP's demand and unleashed his own counter-terror that resulted in the virtual annihilation of the then leadership of the JVP. Let it not be forgotten that the present UNP leader, Ranil Wickremasinghe, was a leading and powerful figure in Premadasa's government during those dark and violent days.

The caretaker government as now proposed by the JVP would be headed by the Chief Justice, as Chairman, with seven others nominated by a Constitutional Council, and both the Presidential and General elections should be held on the same day.

There is no provision under the present constitution (spearheaded by former President J R Jayawardene and adopted in 1978) for the setting up of a caretaker government as proposed by the JVP and agreed by the other parties. However it is possible under the constitution for a caretaker cabinet to be appointed from amongst persons elected to parliament by the exercise of the franchise of the people. If the proposal of the JVP as agreed by the other parties is to have constitutional force, the constitution itself must be amended which should be approved in a popular referendum.

In the context of the fact that the opposition parties do not control even a simple majority in parliament, for their proposals to be adopted with the required majority, it would require the support of a substantial section of the governing party too. This is likely to be an unlikely prospect, according political analysts in Colombo. If the governing party does not play ball with the opposition, what then? Recourse to extra-constitutional means? One has to wait for the unfolding of events?

● TULF Taken to Task

The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) was the target of sharp criticism from LTTE circles for its stand on the no confidence motion proposed by the UNP. In explaining statement issued by the party, the TULF's senior vice president V Anadansanagari said on 11 May that his party would not support the opposition's move to bring a no-confidence motion against the government at this juncture. "After years of waiting, finally we are seeing some rays of hope of peace talks. We do not want to be blamed for scuttling the peace talks by upsetting the set-up. It

seems that the government has finally realised the importance of a negotiated settlement. Though there is some confusion over the stand taken by the LTTE on the matter, we hope that the clouds will be cleared soon, adding that he had serious doubts about the no-confidence motion coming into effect as "it is foolish for the United National Party as a responsible opposition to bring such a motion to coincide with the peace talks".

However, he did not rule out possibilities of the TULF reconsidering the decision if things became gloomy gain. "As for now, we have no idea of supporting the motion, but if the government suddenly changes its stance and focuses only on the war again, then that is another matter," he said.

The TULF has five members in Parliament without which it would be difficult for the UNP to muster the required votes to defeat the government.

The TULF statement issued by its Secretary-General, R Sampanthan, said, "The present is the most opportune time for the evolution of a just durable and peaceful solution to the Tamil National question. The vast majority of all people in the country (in particular, the Tamil people in the North-East who have borne the brunt of the war) are yearning for peace, and very much desire that they should not continue to be subjected to the suffering and hardship inflicted on them by a continuing war. The Norwegian government at the invitation of the Sri Lankan Government, with the consent of the L.T.T.E. continues to play an effective role towards the negotiation of an acceptable political settlement. The search for peace has the fullest support of the International Community, which has greatly contributed towards the strengthening of the peace process. This is the first time since the Indian initiative in the 1980's, that a historic opportunity has presented itself for a just and durable peaceful resolution of the Tamil National Question through negotiations. he TULF considers it most regrettable that smooth progress towards the commencement of negotiations has been impeded by certain events. The TULF states that the launching of the "Agni Kheela I" military offensive by the Government Forces on the 25th April, in the Jaffna peninsula, was a monumental military misadventure which only entailed the loss of over 600 precious lives, and grievous to many more other hundreds of young persons on both sides. Such tragic military exercises in futility can only disrupt the meaningful search for a peaceful solution to the Tamil National question and cause greater suffering and hardship to the Tamil civilian populace.

"The TULF strongly holds the view that the conduct of serious negotiations while continuing to fight a fierce war, is an unrealistic proposition and cannot end in success. The TULF strongly appeals to both sides to the military conflict, to bring all military operations to an end, and constructively engage them in the negotiation of a just and durable peaceful resolution to the Tamil National question.

"The TULF appreciates the reiteration of the continued commitment of both the Government and the LTTE. To the pursuit of the Norwegian initiative. The TULF appeals to both the Government and the LTTE to extend their fullest support to the Norwegian initiative so that early constructive negotiations could commence.

"The TULF calls upon the Government and the main opposition party the United National Party (UNP) to recognise that the Sri Lankan State is primarily responsible for the outbreak of the current violent conflict, which has inflicted immense suffering and hardship on the Tamil people and that it behoves the Sri Lankan Government and the main opposition party the UNP to take every possible step to facilitate the commencement of a constructive dialogue that would end the conflict within the framework upon the basis of which the Norwegian initiative has commenced."

No sooner the TULF statement was published, it came under fire from the Tamil Congress and LTTE circles for its refusal to support the UNP-initiated no-confidence motion against the government amid suggestions the TULF had urged Britain to proscribe the LTTE earlier this year.

"There is no connection between the no confidence motion against Chandrika government and peace talks with Liberation Tigers. By trying to show that there is a link, TULF is trying to protect Chandrika government," the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) leader and Jaffna District Member of Parliament, Appapillai Vinayagamoorthy told reporters.

"So far TULF has been covertly supporting the Chandrika government, now they have shown it publicly," he charged.

In an editorial comment, the 'Tamil Guardian' (16 May) was more scathing in its attack on the TULF: "The TULF has, quite rightly, come under strong criticism from the other Tamil parties for yet again demonstrating a mercenary trait. Fear of losing its handful of seats in Jaffna has reportedly motivated the party leadership to shirk from challenging the government. ....

"The core of its voter support is primarily in the eastern province, where its activists and leaders have consistently adopted a pro-armed struggle line. Therefore, if the party fears loss of its seats in Jaffna, its refusal to oppose the government alongside the UNP at this juncture, will inevitably result in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

"The revival of the TULF's fortunes in recent times had reflected the faith amongst its disillusioned supporters that the party had turned the page on its past characterised by cringing before Sinhala-dominated governments.

"The TULF has a less than honourable past, marked from the late seventies by the betrayal of Tamil political aspirations for the personal betterment of its leaders.

"The ascendancy of the Tamil armed movements was also matched by the TULF's fall from grace not only as a result of popular Tamil anger Colombo's refusal to accommodate their political aspirations but also the party's readiness to collaborate with the government's politico-military strategies. The party had drifted so far from its founding ideals, its name had become wholly inappropriate.

"The TULF's hypocritical justification for its stance this week was that this was 'an opportune moment' for peace, and that unity between the UNP and the ruling People's Alliance (PA) should be the order of the day. ....

"The party's prevarication on the no-confidence motion has demonstrated yet again, the yawning gap between its activists, who campaign amongst the Tamil people, and its ageing leadership, which is more concerned with its craving for inclusion in governing circles.

"Whilst the TULF's refusal last year to back President Kumaratunge's devolution proposals bolstered the party's stock amongst the Tamils, it also earned its leadership the President's ire. The TULF's cowardice this weekend will inevitably damage the former without assuaging the latter.

"The TULF's leadership is at a crossroads. It can stand and face the government with popular Tamil sentiment behind it, or it can continue the party's ignominious tradition of placing self-interests before those the Tamil people. An opportune moment indeed. The Tamil people watch with considerable interest."

These harsh criticisms of the TULF provoked reports in the Colombo media alleging that the LTTE was putting pressure on the TULF to vote in support of the UNP-sponsored no confidence motion to bring down the present government. They said that at present the TULF was in a dilemma caught between its own better judgement and the LTTE which somehow wants to bring down President Kumaratunga's government. One report said, "The party is stuck in a political quagmire unable to devise a strategy to face the situation. If it supports the UNP, then it will be accused of scuttling the peace moves and if it backs the government, it will earn the wrath of the LTTE."

Following this blistering attack, the TULF leadership would appear to have undergone a abrupt change of heart and issued a statement which said, "The TULF therefore earnestly calls upon the Government in consultation with the Norwegian special envoy to take a favourable decision early in regard to terminating the proscription of the LTTE, thereby removing a major hurdle to the commencement of negotiations."

MP V. Ananda Sangari, acting leader of the party, said that the TULF had always insisted on lifting the ban on the LTTE, adding "We had even suggested that if the government had any difficulty in view of the fact that it had gone around the world asking every country to proscribe the LTTE, in such an event we suggested lifting of the ban in a limited way if necessary and persuade the LTTE to accept it by giving in to some of the other demands of the LTTE." ❑

NEWS REVIEW

● 'BAN, A MAJOR HURDLE'SAYS LTTE

May 18 - The Liberation Tigers said in a statement from Friday 18 May that Sri Lanka's ban on their organisation "has become the major hurdle for the initiation of peace talks" out of three factors as pre-requisite necessary steps, the other two being "removing the economic blockade in the Tamil homeland" and "declaring of an indefinite ceasefire". Giving details of the discussions between the Norwegian delegation and members of the LTTE's Central committee, the movement said in a statement from the Vanni Secreterait that "The international community should understand that we cannot participate in peace talks as an illegal, criminal entity with a distorted false label as 'terrorists'."

The LTTE's press release said that the "Norwegian delegates comprising of Mr. Erik Solheim, the Special Envoy for Sri Lanka, Mr. Jon Westborg, the Norwegian Ambassador in Colombo, Ms. Kjersti Tromsdal, an executive officer of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry met the LTTE delegates in Mallawi yesterday. The talks lasted for five hours from 3p.m to 8p.m. The LTTE delegates consisted of Mr. Tamil Chelvan, the head of the political section, two other Central Committee members Mr. Nadesan and Tamilenthi, the head of the political administration Mr. Thangan, and two other officials of the political wing Mr. Pulithevan and Mr. George."

Explaining the position of the LTTE with regard to peace talks Mr. Tamil Chelvan said that the proscription of the Liberation Tigers in Sri Lanka has become the major hurdle for the initiation of peace talks and the LTTE would never take part in the talks as a banned, illegal, terrorist organisation.

"It is wrong to assume the LTTE is deliberately procrastinating the peace talks. We always requested the Sri Lankan State to create a congenial climate conducive for talks. We have consistently pleaded for the removal of the blockade on food, medicine and other essential items in Tamil areas and create a condition of normalcy. We have always insisted that we cannot participate in peace negotiations while engaging in a bloody war. Furthermore, we wish to enter political negotiations with Sri Lanka as the authentic, legitimate representatives of our people for which the proscription on our organisation should be lifted. These are not demands or preconditions for talks but rather prerequisite necessary steps to create the very foundation for political negotiations. The international community should understand that we cannot participate in peace talks as an illegal, criminal entity with a distorted false label as 'terrorists'. Our liberation movement cannot be equated with other rebel groups who participated in peace talks as proscribed organisations. We have fought a liberation war for more than two decades and have a standard conventional army and a mass of territory under our administrative control. The historical conditions of our struggle are unique and cannot be compared to IRA, PLO and other rebel groups in northeast India. It is the collective aspiration of our people that the ban on our liberation organisation should be lifted. If Sri Lanka wants peace and a permanent resolution of the ethnic conflict, it should not hesitate to remove the ban as the Tamil people's demand", Mr. Tamil Chelvan explained to the Norwegian delegates.

The Norwegian proposal of the 'Memorandum of Understanding' was also discussed. The LTTE delegates suggested certain alterations in the document. The Tamil Tigers also emphasised the importance of cease-fire for the implementation of the MOU and for the commencement of talks. No agreement was reached at this discussion. Both parties agreed to continue the deliberations at a later date. The Norwegian delegates left for Colombo early in this morning," the press release said.

● THE BUG WITH A POLITICAL MESSAGE

May 18 - Hundreds of companies worldwide have fallen prey to another mass-mailing computer-bug called

'Mawanella', named after the Sri Lankan village where clashes between the majority Sinhalese and minority Muslims recently occurred. The bug carried a message protesting the attacks on Muslims, but did no real damage besides clogging networks with e-mail, the report by CNET News.com said.

The bug had mainly affected companies in Australia and Europe, Vincent Gullotto, director of the antivirus emergency response team at security company Network Associates, was quoted by CNET as saying.

"We got lots of reports coming in throughout Europe within a two or three-hour period," he said. "While it's blasted Europe, it's been spotty in the U.S."

In total, Network Associates received more than 100 reports of virus infections from companies worldwide. Clients of Network Associates rival Symantec, the antivirus software maker, submitted a similar number of reports, Symantec said.

The bug comes attached to an e-mail message disguised as a note from a friend or colleague. When opened on a system with Microsoft Outlook installed, the attachment—Mawanella.vbs—sends a copy of itself to every entry in the address book.

After the mass mailing, the virus will bring up a dialog box with the message: "Mawanella is one of the Sri Lanka's Muslim Village. This brutal incident happened here 2 Moslem Mosques & 100 Shops are burnt. I hate this incident, What about you? I can destroy your computer. I didn't do that because I am a peace-loving citizen."

The message appears on every Windows 9x, NT and 2000 machine infected by the virus, even if Outlook is not installed.

"It's one of the ones that is socio-political; I'm not sure if there has ever been one from Sri Lanka, but it's typical," said Vincent Weafer, director of Symantec's antivirus research center. "It is someone who wants to get a message out." "I do expect that this one will have a fairly short life," he said.

● ADDRESSING LTTE PRE-REQUISITES

A group of peace activists have urged the Government and the LTTE to commence peace talks without any obstacle being permitted to delay or derail them. They have also asked the Government to address the LTTE's 'pre-requisites' as part of confidence building measures to enable talks.

In their statement they say: "The peace process is reported to be at an impasse with the LTTE setting out three pre-requisites to be met by the government prior to the commencement of peace talks. These pre-requisites are the lifting of the government's ban on it, the lifting of the economic embargo on territories controlled by it and a formal declaration of a permanent ceasefire by the government. We, the undersigned organisations, have advocated unconditional peace talks between the two sides with third party assistance and confidence-building measures. We continue to hold that the commencement of peace talks between the government and LTTE should be given the highest priority with no obstacle being permitted to delay or derail them.

We regret that the government failed to reciprocate the LTTE's goodwill gesture of an unilateral ceasefire for four months. We see it as a lost opportunity for a mutually satisfactory peace process to have developed. The recent assassination attempt on the leader of the LTTE's political wing, S P Thamilchelvan, demonstrates the urgent need for confidence-building measures to assure the LTTE that the peace process will bring tangible benefits.

Accordingly we call on the government to address the three pre-requisites of the LTTE in the spirit of a confidence-building exercise without which peace talks are unlikely to commence at all. In particular we see the government's ban on the LTTE as no longer relevant, when it is hoping to sit with it at the negotiating table in a spirit of equality and give and take. We note in this context that the government has encouraged religious and foreign dignitaries to meet with the LTTE which further confirms the irrelevancy of the ban. We urge the two parties to recognise each other's legitimacy for the purpose of getting the peace talks off the ground.

We also call on the LTTE to prepare their proposed framework of positions and principles which can be used by the Norwegian peace envoys to facilitate a negotiated settlement. By their very nature the political negotiations that both sides are preparing for imply a willingness to be flexible. For the peace process to be ultimately successful, each side needs to see it as a shared project in which flexibility and compromise are of the essence."

The signatories to this statement are: E.P. Nanayakkara, Association of Relatives of Servicemen Missing in Action, Kelaniya; Visaka Dharmadasa, Association of War Affected Women, Kandy; Shyama Ratnayake, Children and Nature, Kandy; Shanthi Sachitanandam, National Peace Council, Colombo; B.A.S. Sufyan, Northern Muslims Rights Organisation, Puttalam; Samson Jayasinghe, Sama Sevaya, Anuradhapura;D.D.N.C. Wimalaratne, Rural and Community Development Cooperation, Wadduwa.

● BATTLE LOST TO AID TALKS!

In preparing for a demonstration and picket outside the Sri Lanka High Commission in London, the UK branch of the ultra-nationalist Sihala Urumaya (SU) distributed a document world-wide which alleged that the recent military operation, "Agni Kheela", undertaken by the army in Jaffna was deliberately lost sacrificing the life of 300 soldiers so that the defeat could be used as an excuse by the Government to begin talks with the LTTE.

"There is a strong suspicion that the Agni keela operation was purposely lost with the connivance of the top army officials, so that it could be used as an excuse to begin the talks. 300 soldiers were killed, 1800 wounded, most lost limbs. None of the sophisticated and stand off weapons such as MBRLS were used during the operation" alleged the document prepared and distributed by UK branch of SU.

Having been apprised of the allegations against the "top generals" contained in the document, it is learnt that, in a confidential internal letter, the SU leader and Secretary General Thilak Karunaratne asked the UK branch to make, before distribution, corrections to the document removing all references of accusations against the 'top generals' and substituting them with allega-

tions against a "Political General" as he was responsible for the debacle of "Agni Kheela" which resulted with a death of 300 government soldiers.

Mr. Karunaratne, writing from Colombo, also blasted the government for the whole debacle, in the letter addressed to Mr. Dhammika Mawella of the UK branch. "We certainly do not think that our heroic armed forces will deliberately lose any battle sacrificing invaluable lives, disabling many more and expending valuable military hardware. The reference to top army officials including General Anton Wijendra is unfair to say the least. We blame the government and "the Political General" for this debacle but not the professional soldiers who are doing their utmost to save the motherland from the cancer of LTTE terrorism," SU leader said in his letter.

● 'TIME TO TRANSLATE CRY FOR PEACE INTO REALITY'

A peace group comprising some of Sri Lanka's intellectuals has called for an immediate ceasefire on the war front and talks between the Government and the LTTE.

The peace support group of the Centre for Policy Alternatives said the disastrous consequences of the recent operation Agni Khiela provided yet another indication that a military solution would only lead to a bloody stalemate.

"In this context, we regret the decision of the Government to allow the truce to lapse at the end of the 5-day period and to launch an all out ground offensive. We also regret the LTTE's decision to allow its unilateral cease-fire to lapse on April 24. The present situation can easily lead to an intractable impasse and the de-railing of peace initiatives on which peace-loving peoples on both sides of the ethnic divide have pinned their hopes.

"We strongly feel that the Government has the primary responsibility now, in initiating a process leading to a full-fledged ceasefire and cessation of hostilities with the good offices of Norwegian facilitation. Since the LTTE has already stipulated the need for a ceasefire, the prospects for a mutually reciprocated cessation of hostilities could be put in place immediately. The draft proposals for the necessary monitoring mechanisms of the ceasesfire and cessation of hostilities, arising out of Norwegian facilitation, can then be activated by mutual consent.

"As peace initiatives relating to internal armed conflicts elsewhere have shown us, the de-proscription of an anti-State movement inevitably takes place with advances made at the negotiation table. In this, the LTTE has the primary responsibility to ensure that the issue of the ban is treated as a negotiable demand, along with other political and humanitarian demands, and not as a non-negotiable pre- condition for commencement of peace talks. "It is time to translate the anguished cry for peace of the Peoples of this country into a reality," said the statement signed by Sunila Abeysekera, Sunanda Deshapriya, Rohan Edirisinha, Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu and Javid Yusuf.

● MAWANELLA: LSSP CALLS FOR PROBE

The LSSP has called on the government to appoint a Commission of Inquiry into the Mawanella incident with terms of reference wide enough to cover the allegation that area politicians had been in league with the hoodlums who initiated the events.

The LSSP, a constituent member of the government, said it appreciates the steps promptly taken by the President to ensure that the events which had taken place in Mawanella from the 30th April to the 2nd of May did not spread communal tension in the rest of the country. The events at Maradana on the following Friday was proof that interested parties were exploiting the unfortunate events in Mawanella in order to create disorder in the rest of the country.

The LSSP had a fact finding team headed by Professor Tissa Vitharane on an on the spot study of the happenings. We are surprised that despite the developing friction in the area the police had taken no steps to defuse the situation. Part of the vehemence of feeling was created by the local police by their acts of commission and omission.

What is equally surprising is that no politician had intervened to restore order and peace despite the presence in the District of several PA politicians who had been chosen as representatives of the people in various political bodies.

The Report to the LSSP is that when Provincial Counsellor Sirisena Rajapakse who resides in the Kegalle town alerted the Chief Minister on the dangerous situation that had developed on the 2nd of May these were denied by the political authorities in the Mawanella Pradesiya Sabha when they were consulted. It is this kind of deliberate indifference by political representatives to the plight of the people of Mawanella that has made them cast suspicion on the politicians themselves.

The LSSP is aware that both Muslims and Sinhalese have suffered from these events and it extends to all of them its sympathies. But the LSSP which has had a long enduring political presence in the Kegalle district will be failing in its responsibility to the people if it does not mention the clear fact that it is the Muslim people that had suffered most as the events unfolded.

It is from the Muslim owned "Bake House" that the hoodlums who started the events on the 30th April attempted to extort money. It was a Muslim person that the hoodlums punished for non compliance. Amir who was this victim was taken to the center of the town and tied to a post there and cut with a razor in his face and chest. With two policemen too present there the hoodlums challenged the people to free the victim if they dared to think that they could. Most of the business premises that were damaged were of Muslims. The dead person and those who were injured were Muslims.

In the failure of the police to arrest and produce in Court the miscreants of the 30th April the Muslim population that suffered the indignity and humiliation of the previous day were helpless. They had no alternative but to picket for justice.

The police did not attempt to prevent the attack on the picket by a mob that had descended on the town for this very purpose. In fact the Muslim perception is that the police too had joined in the attack. The LSSP urges that the officers seen to be at fault at the various stages of these events be transferred out in order to restore normalcy in the area.

As it is reported that the police have

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already arrested some persons on their alleged involvement in the damage caused to the mosques we do not want to comment on this. We are glad that the President has taken action to repair the damage and compensate the dead and the injured.

The widely prevalent impression is that the hoodlums and the police would not have acted so outrageously if they had not the protection of the politicians. This feeling has to be met not by ignoring the charge but by due inquiry into what is alleged.

● STOP FIGHTING AND ENTER PEACE PROCESS - US

May 6 - US Secretary of State General Colin Powell, has reaffirmed the US Government's commitment to Sri Lanka's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity and urged the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to stop fighting and enter the peace process.

General Colin Powell warmly received the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar at the State Department in Washington DC on 4 May.

During their 45 minutes discussion, the Foreign Minister briefed the Secretary of State on the current situation in Sri Lanka and the Government's resolve to seek a negotiated political settlement to the ongoing conflict. The Foreign Minister stated the commitment of the Government towards an effective devolution of power, settlement of the ethnic issue and the detailed steps taken towards this end. The relevance of the facilitation process undertaken by Norway, with the aim of bringing the parties to the negotiating table was emphasised.

Secretary Powell expressed appreciation of Sri Lanka's efforts to resolve the ethnic question within the country's democratic framework. While reaffirming the US Government's rejection of a separate state and its consistent policy of support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka, the Secretary of State expressed hope that a cessation of hostilities would be arranged and that, for its part, the Government of Sri Lanka would do all it could to assure that the conflict would be brought to a close.

● CANADIAN HC MEETS THAMIL CHELVAM

May 2 The Canadian High Commission in a press release confirmed that High Commissioner Ruth Archibald had a meeting with LTTE political wing leader Thamil Chelvam during her visit to the Wanni on 1 May.

The press release stated that the meeting between High Commissioner Archibald and Thamil Chelvam and other representatives of the local authority provided an opportunity to communicate directly to all parties to the conflict in Sri Lanka, Canada's desire for peace and the belief that the fighting must stop.

"Canadian High Commissioner Ruth Archibald completed a long scheduled visit to the Wanni area of Sri Lanka on Tuesday, May 1. The principal purpose of the visit, which was organised through the appropriate authorities of the Government of Sri Lanka, was to visit programs funded by the Canadian

government through the Canadian International Development Agency CIDA and implemented through International Non-Government Agencies.

Ms Archibald visited projects implemented by the Canadian Red Cross, CANCROSS delegated by the ICRC. The project aims at strengthening the capacity of the Sri Lankan Red Cross and enables it to provide five mobile health teams and 26 Primary Health Centres that supplement the reduced capacity of the government health care system in that region. Ms. Archibald met project workers in Puthukudiyiruppi and with a project doctor and health care workers at one of the centres.

The High Commissioner also toured the medical unit at Mallawi, which, with programming provided by Medecins Sans Frontiers (Holland), funded up to 40% by the Canadian International Development Agency, now provides three additional units for surgical, obstetric/ gynecologys and paediatric cases, to the two managed by the government. This medical unit provides the only referral point in the entire region functions as a de facto hospital.

The High Commissioner was also able to visit projects implemented by CARE, also funded by CIDA, which demonstrated the success of CARE's Food Security Project in providing training and extension services for small farmer groups as well as savings and credit programs for small community groups of women that enabled them to increase their food security as well as to generate additional income.

The tour enabled the Canadian mission to discuss the current humanitarian situation with international agencies working in the Wanni, including the International Committee of the Red Cross which also receives financial support from Canada.

The visit was one of a series of periodic visits undertaken by representatives of the Canadian government to evaluate the effectiveness of the humanitarian assistance provided through Canadian support as well as allowing Canadian diplomats to gain a first hand assessment of the conflict and current prospects for peace.

The High Commissioner met with Mr. Thamil Chelvam and other representatives of the local authority. The meeting provided an opportunity to communicate directly, and to all parties to the conflict in Sri Lanka, Canada's desire for peace and belief that the fighting must stop.

The Government of Canada believes strongly that the conflict can only be brought to an end through a political settlement and is fully supportive of efforts of the Government of Norway to encourage this process".

● SURESH APPEAL: A CANADIAN TEST CASE ON DEPORTATION

Manickavasagam Suresh appeal against the judgement of the Federal Court of Appeal is coming before the Supreme Court of Canada for hearing on May 22, 2001. The appeal is against the judgement of the Federal Court of Appeal which upheld orders for Suresh deportation to Sri Lanka. The appeal is based on the ground that he would be tortured and his life is at risk if deported to Sri Lanka.

Suresh's case is twinned with the case of Mansour Ahani, an Iranian, who also has been accused by the Canadian government of involvement in terrorism. Ahani had admitted to Canadian officials that he had been trained as a member of the Iranian secret service, and government accused him of having plotted to kill an Iranian dissident in Italy on behalf of the Iranian security services.Suresh was arrested on October 18, 1995 on a security certificate signed by the Minister of Immigration and the Solicitor General of Canada under Section 40.1 of the Immigration Act. He was then incarcerated in Toronto (Don) Jail for 27 months not by a Court of law, but by an administrative fiat by the above two Ministers concerned.

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) claimed Suresh had been sent to Canada to oversee the crucial Canadian arm of the Tamil Tigers' global fundraising network. It withheld his security clearance preventing him gaining landed immigrant status. He has not been accused of committing any crimes in Canada, Sri Lanka or elsewhere.

On August 29, 1997 Mr. Justice Teitelbaum of the Federal Court, Trial Division rendered judgement against Manickavasagam Suresh, a Tamil activist and Co-ordinator of the World Tamil Movement. After 52 days of hearing in 1997 the Federal Court Judge merely endorsed the decision of the Ministers by stating " The role of the Court is not to substitute its decision for that of the Minister and the Solicitor General of Canada, nor is it to find that they were correct in their assessment of the evidence presented to them.... I am here to determine whether there exists sufficient evidence for me to conclude as to the reasonableness of the Certificate signed by the Ministers. It is not to determine the Ministers were correct in their assessment of the evidence. From the evidence presented to me both in camera and in public, it was reasonable for the Ministers to conclude that Mr.Suresh is a person inadmissible into Canada."

The Federal Court Judge agreed Suresh was "a dedicated and trusted member in a leadership position with" the LTTE.

A deportation order was issued in 1997, but Suresh remained in the country as legal appeals were launched. The Supreme Court ruled that Manickavasagam Suresh, a recognized convention refugee from Sri Lanka, could proceed with his appeal against the Federal Court of Appeal judgement before it.

In upholding orders for his deportation, the Federal Court of Appeal said last January that those who raise money for terrorism are as culpable as those who actually plant a bomb. It said that Suresh should be returned to Sri Lanka irrespective of the consequences. Justice Joseph Robertson in his judgement citing evidence that Canada is home to more international terrorist groups than any other country in the world said, "I cannot accept the ... argument that the right under international law to be secure against torture is absolute and binding on Canada ..... To the extent that Canada is not already a haven for terrorists, the government has a legitimate right to ensure that it does not become such."

Canada signed a 1987 convention forbidding deportation to a country where there were "substantial grounds" for believing a person would be in danger of torture. Robertson ruled that this

right was not absolute and did not bind Canada if it conflicted with domestic law.

The Supreme Court, hearing the cases on May 22, will consider claims from the refugees' lawyer that the Immigration Act violates the country's 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The issues coming up for argument before the Supreme Court are fundamental to the protection of human rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and UN Conventions Against Torture. The issues are:

(a) Whether the principles of a free and democratic society allow sending a Convention refugee to a country which may torture him;

(b) Whether the procedural protection in place for a determination under section 53 of the Immigration Act bars constitutional scrutiny;

(c) Whether a person can be deported solely on the basis of a lawful political activity in support of a national liberation movement is protected expression; and

(d) Whether the right to freedom of association in this context can be claimed by a non-citizen.

No less than eight interests groups, including Amnesty International, Bar Association of Canada, Canadian Council for Refugees, Federation of Association of Canadian Tamils (FACT) and the Canadian Arab Federation are challenging the ruling of the Federal Court Appeal.Suresh's lawyers plan to argue that Manickavasagam Suresh, alleged to be a member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, cannot be deported because the country is bound by international conventions against torture. David Matas, the Winnipeg immigration lawyer representing the bar association, said the government must protect people from torture regardless of whether they are terrorists, war criminals or even torturers themselves. "Our position is the obligation not to return is absolute and there is no exception." The position is similar to that being taken by other interveners in the case, all of which oppose Suresh deportation. This will be the first time that the Supreme Court of Canada has been asked to consider these issues and rule on them. Whether Suresh will get deported to Sri Lanka now depends on Supreme Court's ruling. ❐

The Peace Process: Prospects and Problems

Dr Jehan Perera

In focussing attention upon the peace process in Sri Lanka, it has been easy to put aside the need to obtain opposition UNP support for it. Generally the call for peace is addressed to the government and LTTE, whether by local civic organisations or by foreign governments. The most recent call by the US government for a cessation of hostilities and peace talks was likewise addressed to these two main parties. One reason is that it is easier to focus attention on two variables rather than three. Another reason is that the UNP opposition has so far not been a major obstructing factor where the peace process is concerned.

The period after the 1994 elections has been markedly different from the period that came before in terms of the ethnic conflict. It has had a government leadership that has been consistent in its analysis that there is indeed an ethnic conflict in the country that needs a political solution. It has also had an opposition UNP leadership that has been consistent in not whipping up communal passions for the sake of narrow political advantage. This is not only reflective of the improved state of consciousness of the country's political leadership with regard to the ethnic conflict. It also reflects the changes that have taken place within the consciousness of the masses of people who have seen the ill effects of the politics of nationalism and tend to shy away from those who continue to advocate it.

Despite these two immensely positive features, however, it is a self evident truth that the civil war stemming from the ethnic conflict has got aggravated since 1994. The government has publicly accepted and reiterated the position that there is an ethnic conflict in the country. But it has sought to resolve it on its own terms rather than through a genuine process of dialogue and compromise with those leading the separatist rebellion.

On the other hand, the mainstream opposition leadership has refrained from mobilising communal sentiment to its side. But it has also held back from actively supporting the government to resolve the ethnic conflict, for instance, in its reluctance to support the government-led constitutional reform process. Certainly, both of these negative features above are understandable when viewed from the perspective of the government and UNP respectively. It is the nature of those who head an elected government to resist negotiating with their rivals for power within the country on a basis of equality and respect. So long as the elected heads of government see themselves as rulers and not as servants of the people it is inevitable that they will seek to unilaterally impose their will on their opponents.

In tandem with this perception among ruling politicians is the perception of opposition politicians. So long as opposition politicians sees themselves as the government-in-waiting in a competitive political system, they will hesitate at taking measures that might help the government in power to solve the problems it faces. Instead they will tend to undermine the government in power and make its task of governing the country more difficult. But should it not be country before political party? This is the dilemma that the current UNP leadership faces.

Commitment to National Interest

It is to the credit of the UNP's present leadership that it has held back those sections of the party that would use the ethnic conflict to mobilise nationalist sentiment against the government's peace initiatives. As the recent anti-Muslim violence in Mawanella and subsequent Muslim violence in Colombo demonstrated, the country is a potential powder keg of tension that can be sparked off in an uncontrollable manner. The UNP has been extremely responsible in mobilising the people in

this context so as not to destabilise the entire country.

The UNP should commit itself to not putting its partisan political agendas above the national interest. The spirit of an overriding commitment to the national interest above all else must permeate all statements issued by the party leadership. But this was not the public message that came out of Ranil Wickremesinghe's statement in Oslo a few weeks ago.

The UNP leader was invited there obviously to obtain his support for the Norwegian-brokered peace process. However, while in Oslo, Ranil Wickremasinghe made a bald statement that the UNP would not give its support to the government's efforts to take forward the peace process unless the government agreed to the setting up of the four independent commissions. There is no question that setting up independent commissions for police, public service, elections and the judiciary are essential for the good governance of the country. For instance, the recent outbreak of anti-Muslim violence in Mawanella and its implications, including the loss of life and property, were of serious concern to democratic governance in the country. The violence appears to have been unleashed against Muslim traders in the town of Mawanella by mafia associated with high ranking ruling politicians in the area, including a minister of the government. The mafia had apparently been attempting to extort money from the traders.

It has been alleged that the police officers on the scene failed in their duty to halt the mafia for fear of their political connections. This incident powerfully demonstrates the need for an independent police commission, among other necessary non-partisan institutions, so that the institutions of the state can act promptly and without fear or favour to ensure the rights of all sections of the people. For peace in Sri Lanka, people have to be assured that justice will be done to them. This is the trust building that is demanded of any peace process.

UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe's concern that the four independent commissions are part of any peace package is understandable in the context of practical realities prevailing in Sri Lanka. There must be justice and good governance not only for the Tamil people but for all people if Sri Lanka is to be one country. But the careless manner in which he appeared to hold the fragile Norwegian-facilitated peace process hostage to the four independent commissions in Oslo was not befitting of a national leader. The UNP needs to find a new language and spirit to ensure that it is able to coordinate its own interests as an opposition party with the larger interests of the country.

Factors Aiding Peace Process

It was ironical that the LTTE felt it necessary to upbraid the government recently for making overly optimistic pronouncements about the peace process and the Norwegian role in it. Until last month, the government was circumspect about the forward movement of the peace process, and about the possibility of reaching even preliminary agreements with the LTTE. But suddenly the dynamics supportive of the peace process appear to have changed for the better, at least from the government's side.

It is nonetheless a great pity that this change should have taken place after

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over 300 government troops have been killed, some 2000 injured and billions of rupees expended in one more effort at military victory. It is little consolation that the LTTE suffered serious losses as well in the battle that took place last April. The peace process could have commenced in earnest several months ago in December last year when the LTTE first declared its unilateral ceasefire or even as late as February this year after the British government banned them as a terrorist organisation. But the endless pursuit of the elusive position of strength put paid to such hopes. The contrast between the present British leadership and that of Sri Lanka is instructive in this regard. British Prime Minister Tony Blair is expected to lead his government to a landslide election victory, even bigger than the previous one. What is notable about his leadership is that instead of waiting for problems to grow until they get too big to handle effectively, he has moved forward to nip them in the bud. An example relevant to Sri Lanka would be the manner in which he anticipated the rise of nationalist forces in the United Kingdom. Instead of waiting for the people of Scotland and Wales to rise up and demand autonomy from the central government, he positively urged them to take on more powers of self-government.

When it concerns the ethnic conflict, Sri Lanka has had the misfortune of not having such a visionary leadership. Successive governments have procrastinated in addressing the problem, coming up with too little too late that would satisfy the ethnic minorities. The ethnic conflict being one that evokes powerful sentiments and fears among all sections of people, has induced governments to cater to those of the ethnic majority which deliver the bulk of the vote.

However, there are occasions when events line up in a way that makes accommodation and compromise with the ethnic minorities essential for a government's survival. The present moment appears to be one such. The government's recent statements applauding the Norwegian role in the peace process, and calling for it to be hastened, has much to do with the imperatives of political survival. The generality of politicians are in it for the power. Their sincerity in addressing any national issue is bound up with the prospects of their survival by either addressing it or not.

Tremendous Pressure

It is evident that at the present time the government is under tremendous pressure from three different directions. Each of these pressures would induce the government to hasten the peace process as the best way to reduce the adverse consequences that arise from these pressures.

The first is the continuing downward spiral of the economy and the increasingly harsh conditions that the international donor agencies are placing on the government as conditions for their aid. These include further increasing the widely impacting goods and services tax and freezing the salaries of the public sector despite the substantial rise in the general price level. In the absence of a peace dividend and the special flows of foreign aid that will surely accompany a return to peace, the government has no choice but to agree to the harsh conditions imposed on it by foreign technocrats. Even the Central Bank in its most recent annual report has come out strongly calling for an end to the war if the economy is to recover. This statement by the Central Bank is an unprecedented one, as the Central Bank usually steers clear of any controversy in which it cannot side with what the government has been doing.

The second source of pressure on the government is the threat of LTTE military action, both within and outside the north-east, now that the LTTE's unilateral ceasefire is at an end. What the four month ceasefire did was to give the people, and also the ruling politicians, an inkling of the relief that accompanies a lifting of the risk to life from both terrorist and military actions. No one wants to go back to a situation where they feel threatened in their daily lives.

The third, and perhaps most important factor, that is propelling the government towards peace talks with the LTTE is the prospect of facing a no-confidence motion from the opposition UNP. Sections within the UNP, in keeping with the nature of politicians, are clearly impatient for power. They appear to have won the covert support of some members of the ruling party. But for the no-confidence motion to succeed, the support of the Tamil parties in Parliament will be necessary.

It appears that some of the Tamil parties are sympathetic to the notion of defeating the PA government in Parliament and replacing it with a new one in which they can hope to play a part. This would cater to their own self-interest in wielding positions of governmental authority. Further it would satisfy their desire to punish a governmental leadership that has been extraordinarily callous in prosecuting the war against the LTTE without compunction to the people whose lives are destroyed in the process.

Balanced Consideration

But now the Tamil parties have to take cognisance of the fact that the government appears keen on speedily commencing peace talks and de-escalating the war even to the point of going in for a ceasefire. The Tamil parties have also to take into the balance another important consideration. Some of the key individuals in the UNP who are pressing for an early toppling of the government via a no-confidence motion are those who have, on public forums, challenged the Tamil people to prove that they have any genuine grievances. Some of the key rebels against UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe are those who have said there is no ethnic conflict, only a terrorist problem. It is these rebels who are the driving force in pushing the UNP towards trying to pass the no-confidence motion at this crucial juncture when peace talks between the government and LTTE seem to be a handshake away. It is unlikely that their intention is to deliberately scuttle the Norwegian-facilitated peace process. But any serious political embarrassment to the government at this time, and destabilisation of parliamentary politics, would probably have that result.

The TULF position appears to be reasonable in saying that this is the first time since the Indian mediatory efforts in the 1980s that an opportunity for peace has presented itself. The TULF has threatened that if the government did not pursue the path of peace through dialogue, it would consider supporting the UNP's no-confidence motion. The TULF also stated that it was unreasonable to have peace talks while continuing to fight a fierce war. The fighting that took place in April of this year in the Jaffna peninsula following the government's military offensive evoked a

strong negative response even from countries that have banned the LTTE. Both the Indian and US governments expressed their concern at the fighting and reiterated their belief that there was no military solution.

The US statement also mentioned that the fighting needed to cease along with the commencement of the peace talks. While the immediate step that will need to be taken by government and LTTE would be to use to services of the Norwegian facilitator to enter into peace talks, this would require that the two parties should de-escalate the fighting as a first step. The LTTE's position that there should be a formal declaration of a ceasefire, rather than an informal one is reasonable. This is not the time to be reticent about the need for a ceasefire, and preferably a permanent one, after which the struggle for power between the present day belligerents will be by political means and without military killings and terrorist assassinations.

Coping With LTTE's positions

The Norwegian peace envoys five day visit to Sri Lanka, including a stay in the LTTE-controlled Wanni, ended without any significant breakthrough. The peace process is reported to be stalled with the LTTE's insistence on three "pre-requisites" that need to be met by the government prior to the commencement of peace talks. These pre-requisites have not come as a surprise to the government. The LTTE has been repeating for several months that it wants the government to officially engage in a ceasefire, lift the economic embargo on LTTE-controlled areas and lift the ban on it. It was, however, hoped that the LTTE would compromise on these pre-requisites when it came to the actual issue of finalising the dates, venue and agenda of the peace talks. This hope arose because of the ambiguity in the LTTE's own messages regarding the matter. The Norwegian peace envoys who were meeting face-to-face with the LTTE leadership in the Wanni reported back that the LTTE was not imposing any conditions for the talks to begin. On the other hand, the overseas spokesman for the LTTE took a more hardline stance contradicting what the Norwegians were reporting. There was also another ambiguity in the LTTE's statements that provided an occasion for hope that the LTTE would not be uncompromising on the issue of what they considered to be pre-requisites for peace talks to commence. This was the imprecise nature of the terminology used by the LTTE to describe what they really wanted. Softer terms such as "pre-requisites" and "requests" were earnestly counter-posed to that of "pre-conditions" to describe the LTTE's position. But whatever the terms that the LTTE may use, the LTTE does not seem prepared to come for peace talks unless the government accommodates their demands.

It is obvious that the government would have difficulties and concerns about satisfying these LTTE demands prior to the commencement of peace talks. But from a positive perspective the government can approach this problem as providing an opportunity for confidence-building with the Tamil people and the international community regarding its pursuit of peace through negotiations. It must be kept in mind

that the LTTE is not the only other party involved in the peace process whose confidence needs to be gained. There are other parties involved whose pressure on the LTTE could help to moderate its more extreme positions in the future. There are indications that the government is prepared to concede on two of the pre-requisites, but not on the third pertaining to lifting the ban on the LTTE.

There are those who may feel that lifting the economic embargo on LTTE-controlled areas would be a major concession to the LTTE. But in reality, it is probably not an important concession that would boost the LTTE's military capacity anymore than it already is. Reports from those who have been to the LTTE-controlled Wanni indicate that it already has all the cement bunkers it needs. Both the cement and fuel that the government is reluctant to release would greatly assist civilian life in the Wanni, but would not significantly add to the LTTE's military capacity. Relaxing the economic embargo could gain the government a measure of goodwill from the Tamil people.

LTTE Pre-requisites

With regard to the LTTE's pre-requisite for an official and permanent ceasefire, it appears that the government is prepared to accept an unofficial and time-bound one. If so, the government's position is not too far off from that of the LTTE. Whether or not a ceasefire agreement is declared to be permanent, such a ceasefire would turn out to be a time-bound one if either of the two parties decides to end it or violates the agreement.

With both the economic embargo and ceasefire, a problem that the government faces is in facing up to its own past statements. The government criticised the opposition UNP's election time pledges on these two counts. In particular, the government took the position that it would only enter into peace talks with the LTTE while waging war against it. This impractical proposition has now come back to embarrass the government. It is the LTTE's position that military operations and peace talks cannot go hand in hand that has prevailed. Recently even the United States took the position that the hostilities must cease and talks begin. The third pre-requisite of the LTTE that the government's ban on it be lifted is one that goes to the heart of the government's previous strategy to end the ethnic conflict by marginalising and weakening the LTTE. The ban became the government's most formidable weapon to marginalise and weaken the LTTE internationally. The government was able to use the growing international antipathy to terrorist and separatist organisations to put the LTTE on the defensive in many countries that had accommodated it. It was probably the government's success in getting the LTTE banned in the United Kingdom earlier this year that forced the LTTE to rethink its own overall strategy.

The government needs to be satisfied that its earlier strategy to ban the LTTE bore fruit by the very fact that it put pressure on the LTTE to agree to join the peace process. Further, the government's decision to revoke the ban on the LTTE is unlikely to lead other countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and India to immediately revoke their bans on the LTTE. These countries banned the LTTE for reasons of their own, and not because the Sri Lankan government was pleading with them to do it. In the case of the United States and the United Kingdom, the bans on the LTTE were part of a systematic approach in which a large number of other organisations were also banned as being terrorist. It is unlikely that either of these two countries, pre-occupied as they are with many other problems of a global nature, will wish to mobilise their parliaments to swiftly act on the LTTE one way or the other. If the government does lift the ban on the LTTE there is no doubt that its campaign to have the LTTE banned in other countries will have to be curtailed. The government is likely to see this as a weakening of its bargaining position with the LTTE. But the government cannot reasonably expect to continue lobbying other countries to ban the LTTE at a time it is engaged in peace talks with it. Henceforth the government's strategy with regard to the LTTE has to be to include it as a partner in the peace process rather than to exclude it.

Highest Priority

From the point of view of those committed to the peace process the commencement of peace talks between the government and LTTE would be a matter of the highest priority, and no obstacle should be permitted to provide an excuse or reason not to engage in them. Given the LTTE's apparently fixed position, it will be necessary for the government to find the way to address the three pre-requisites of the LTTE without which the peace talks may not commence at all.

The LTTE's uncompromising attitude possibly reflects the military nature of the organisation, which has up to now endeavored to physically eliminate all opposition to it. The LTTE's negotiation strategy of making demands and refusing to budge from them is not likely to be conducive to the long term viability of the peace process. By their very nature political negotiations imply flexibility and compromise. They are based on the premise that neither side has the whole of justice and truth with it. The problem for the LTTE is that it has bred a generation of cadre who believe that they have the whole of justice and truth behind them. The recent assassination attempt against the head of the LTTE's political wing, S. P. Thamilchelvan, when he was on his way to meet with the Norwegian peace envoys points to the possible cracks and divisions in the LTTE's own command structure regarding the peace process.

Unless and until the peace process is seen as bringing the LTTE some substantial tangible benefits, its is unlikely that the LTTE and even its supreme leader Velupillai Prabakaran can be seen to be comfortable with the peace talks. The constraints on the LTTE leadership that has sacrificed a generation if not more to the concept of an independent Tamil state cannot be under-estimated. They will be under pressure to demonstrate gains without compromises from the peace process to their rank and file. Both sides need to be aware of each other's constraints and limitations. To the extent that the peace process is a shared project of the government and LTTE, they need to assist the other out of those problems rather than seek to exploit them. Undoubtedly the government has many problems of its own in meeting the three pre-requisites of the LTTE for peace talks to commence. But as the democratically elected and internationally recognised government of the whole of Sri Lanka, the government has a position of strength from which it can make the first major concessions to peace. ❐

Creating a Climate for Peacemaking

Dr. S. Narapalasingam

The present confused situation in Sri Lanka concerning peace prospects is obvious to anyone who has been following the various comments and reports in the web-sites, email-based news bulletins and local newspapers on the country's ethnic question and the ongoing war between the LTTE and the security forces. These also show that some are still in the fighting mood, some are anxiously waiting for peace talks to begin and for the Government and the main opposition party the politics of power is the usual business. The media too has not been contributing to peace-making.

Lakshman Gunasekara in the Sunday Observer of 1 April has pointed out that it is in the privately-owned newspapers and not in the Government controlled ones that articles explicitly espousing a militarist solution are frequently published. He says: "In fact such articles appear by the dozen in many of these newspapers collectively, not just weekly but daily. This is not to say that Government-controlled newspapers do not carry articles or even editorials espousing or supporting the militarist line. Even under this enlightened, generally non-racist regime of Chandrika Kumaratunga, there are times when such articles appear - although it is rare that such articles would espouse a military solution on explicitly Sinhala ultra-nationalist grounds."

He is also absolutely correct in saying that "the PA seems to adopt a two track strategy with some political front men and some sections of the Government media pushing the jingoistic line while another even more formidable phalanx continues with the peace line". Although there are many who talk up peace, they seem to have not considered this hostile environment that would make it difficult to secure lasting peace. At present, it is the international community that is anxious to see the end of hostilities in Sri Lanka sooner than later. But it cannot do much to create the congenial climate needed for peace-making. This is the duty of all peace-loving Sri Lankans. The fact that we are not anywhere near reconciling our differences must be recognised. When and how a congenial climate for peace-making could be achieved should be considered given the present uncertain situation.

The collapse of previous peace talks and the resumption of the war with increasing intensity had the effect of aggravating the mutual distrust of the warring sides. Certainly peace-making, different from peace-talking, is also going to be difficult as a result of the many unpleasant developments that have taken place since then.

Excesses Security Forces

Despite the Presidential directives that human rights and welfare of detainees should be safeguarded, torture of detainees and rape of women in custody by service personnel have continued daringly. There have been many incidents of sexual violence on Tamil women in parts of the North-East under army control. These indicate that such horrible acts which undermine the government and shame the society and the country cannot be prevented as long as this war lasts. The most recent incident that received wide publicity both in the local and foreign media is the rape and torture of two young Tamil women by several navy and police personnel. They were arrested by the Navy on March 19 on suspicion of having links with the LTTE. Such shameful acts by members of the police, army and navy will only poison the climate for peace-making.

The protracted war has led to many agonizing problems through the spread of the gun culture which is reflected in the sharp escalation of widespread criminal behaviour including committing murders, armed robberies and intimidation. The rise in corruption, breakdown of law and order and in general the decline in ethics and human values are the byproducts of the protracted war. The most compelling reason why the fighting must stop first is the imperative to arrest all these inhuman and anti-social acts that cannot be stopped otherwise. It is meaningless even to talk about a congenial climate for peace, while the people are unlawfully arrested, tortured, raped and harassed by government forces.

Costly Mistakes

Blaming solely the other community for the present predicament is not the way to seek lasting peace. The truth is both the Sinhalese and Tamil leaders have failed to maintain a healthy relationship between the two communities. They ignored the long-term consequences of their communalist rhetoric and divisive actions to inter-ethnic relations and national unity. On the government side one such miscalculation was the anti-Tamil pogrom which it orchestrated in 1983 hoping to intimidate the Tamils into submission. Even later the succeeding governments failed to implement earnestly the approved laws and policies claimed to guarantee equal rights and address the main grievances of the Tamils. Some important bills prepared to prevent discrimination like the Equal Opportunities Bill (this was withdrawn on 20 October 1999) even failed to enter the statute book.

What is relevant and important for ethnic harmony is that the majority in various ethnic groups must **feel** they have equal rights and opportunities. This can only come from appropriate actions consistent with the principle of equality of all citizens, regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliations. Assurances and even laws without the necessary practical steps are meaningless. Herein lies the root of our ethnic problem that has become a national crisis. The Tamils had until the early 1980s been willing to settle for some satisfactory decentralised arrangement, provided the governments implemented it fully in good faith. But this did not happen and what changed this mood after 1983 had been told many times since then.

After the ethnic conflict escalated to a bloody war, the Tamil Tigers have missed several opportunities to reach a compromise and settle for a semi-autonomous provincial system believing that they could force succeeding Sri Lankan governments to accede to their demand for a separate autonomous state in North-East Sri Lanka. World opinion and especially that of India totally

against separation was considered unimportant by the Tigers and their ardent supporters, many of whom were the victims of discrimination and oppression. Settled in foreign countries their support to the Tigers is largely influenced by their previous bitter experiences in Sri Lanka and resurgent Tamil nationalistic feelings.

Some gains achieved by the Tigers in the 18-year war reinforced their confidence in achieving their political goal single-handedly, despite the disapproval of the international community to their violent methods. They pursued this strategy without realising its consequences to the future of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, let alone the problems it would create for an amicable settlement of the conflict. If they had thought by aggravating the division and enmity between the Sinhala and Tamil communities, which was what the Sinhala ultra-nationalists were doing, separation would follow, they were wrong. This has been confirmed by the popular reactions within Sri Lanka and the international community. Paradoxically, the nationalists on either side of the ethnic divide were impulsively striving towards the same goal.

Wishful Thinking

It was wishful thinking that made the Eelamists to assume that the BJP-led Indian government with Tamil nationalist parties as partners in the ruling coalition would be supportive of their wish to set up a separate state of Eelam. These parties sympathize and support the legitimate rights of the Sri Lankan Tamils while some have at convenient times articulated their support to the LTTE. But even such opportunistic expressions of support have hardly helped to foster a climate free of suspicions and anxiety among the Sinhalese who have been reminded constantly and continuously of south Indian invasions of the island in the distant past.

Now the Sri Lankan Tamil journal 'Sudar Oli' has discovered through its reporter who sought the views of Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam(MDMK) general secretary V. Gopalaswami (Vaiko), Pattali Makkal Katchi founder S Ramadoss and Tamils National Movement leader P Nedumaran that they are "opportunistic" leaders. Because they have sidelined Lanka's ethnic crisis during their campaign for the upcoming Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu. The weekly has claimed that all three known in the past for their eloquent support to the cause of the Tamils in Sri Lanka have been careful to avoid the subject now because such support publicly expressed would be electorally disadvantageous. What is clear from the report is that for the so-called pro-LTTE Tamil political leaders in Tamil Nadu, their image and the electoral prospects of their parties are more important than the LTTE.

Hindering the Peace Initiative

The paramount duty of all interested in settling the conflict through serious dialogue between the leaders of the parties committed to a political settlement is to exercise caution in their rhetoric and actions. The harassment of civilians by security personnel as in the Mannar incident is not the action that should happen now. Such isolated incidents may not be the deliberate policy of the military. Nevertheless, these are very sensitive and damaging in many ways and specific steps must be taken to prevent them reoccurring. If this is not the time to win the hearts and minds of the people, one wonders what is in the minds of the authorities.

Speculating ulterior motives for the expected peace talks and raising non-evident obstacles to Norway's initiative are clearly meant to belittle President Chandrika Kumaratunga's efforts to settle the ethnic issue. The fine Sinhala-Tamil collaboration in discrediting the President is seen in one Sunday weekly. If only this kind of alliance is forthcoming for reconciliation and peace-making, the hopes of the anxious millions in the war-torn country will be fulfilled very soon. It is unfortunate at a time when a congenial climate is needed to promote national unity, some Sri Lankan newspapers are also giving undue prominence to extreme and prejudiced views of academics on the ethnic question and to unproductive debates that feed the ethnic division.

The rancorous and racist tone seen in the comments of some expatriate Tamils circulated via the email (mailing list) cannot help to create the "congenial atmosphere" needed to facilitate the peace process. They may get personal satisfaction in airing their views in offensive language but they are also causing problems for the fellow Tamils in Sri Lanka who have to coexist with the Sinhalese and Muslim communities. If the journals which have been espousing the LTTE are now observing moderation, it does not make much sense for others to continue their aggressive attitude.

International Community

The LTTE, in one of its press releases expressed serious reservations over the foreign policy stances of the international community, particularly those of the United States, Britain, other European nations and India towards the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. It states, "by supporting Sri Lanka with financial and military assistance and by condemning and criminalising the Tamil struggle as a phenomenon of 'international terrorism' these governments are not in anyway contributing to the promotion of peace and ethnic reconciliation in the island but encourage the hard-line militaristic approach of a repressive racist regime against the aggrieved and oppressed Tamil nation."

Condemning the international community for its common stand against the division of Sri Lanka and violent methods to achieve political goals is counter-productive. One has only to notice the response of the international community to the struggle for secession by various ethnic groups in different parts of the world. Interestingly, there are some similarities between the causes of the ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The main grievance of the ethnic Albanians, who account for about one third of the 2 million population is the withdrawal of the rights and opportunities they had when Macedonia was part of the socialist republic of Yugoslavia. After independence in 1991, the ethnic Albanians were marginalised by the Macedonian government dominated by the majority Slavs.

Compared with the direct approach and determined efforts made by the Western bloc to stop the fighting in Macedonia and coax the Slavs and the ethnic Albanians to negotiate for a political settlement, Norway's facilitatory role in Sri Lanka would seem relatively powerless. Some EU countries supported by NATO assisted the Macedonian government militarily to defeat the rebels. In Sri Lanka's case, the fact is that the Norwegian peace initiative in Sri Lanka is backed strongly by the EU and the donor community and in effect Norway can be considered as their accredited agent. India too is supporting the Norwegian initiative. Foreign aid is crucial not only for overall economic development and growth but also for the much needed reconstruction and rehabilitation work in the northeast.

Both the Sinhalese and Tamil leaders can only ignore them by sacrificing peace and the well-being of their people. Europe and America have not been consistent in their judgements and actions when defending democracy and human rights in all circumstances and in all places for various reasons. An analysis of this inconsistency is outside the scope of this article. Instead of challenging Europe or America, other persuasive ways to win their sympathy would have been useful for the Tamils. The arrogance and rashness that prevented the Tamil leadership to use these options led to the erosion of the sympathy that sprung after the 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom.

The campaign of the expatriate Tamils should have focused on persuading the international community to urge the Sri Lankan government to suspend the military operations. Instead, the main focus was on fighting and quarrelling as well as challenging the views such as those expressed recently by Ashley Wills, the US Ambassador to Sri Lanka in the frank speech he delivered in Jaffna on 7 March 2001. What the Jaffna Mayor hoped to achieve by his motion to censure the US Ambassador's speech is only known to him! Fortunately, good sense prevailed in the end and the motion was withdrawn.

The Tamils cannot complain that foreign countries showed no interest in playing any direct role to end the conflict, particularly after the manner the 1987 Indian intervention was rejected. Recognising India's interest in the region, the international community allowed India to take the initiative to persuade both parties to accept a reasonable solution. But the Sinhala and Tamil nationalists and opportunist political leaders in the south deprived India of this role. Like the religious fundamentalists our ultra-nationalists too see others through their jaundiced eyes. Their concept of nation and its formation/development are inimical to human advancement in the modern world.

Immediate Challenges and Beyond

The Eelam war that intensified after the collapse of the last peace talks in 1995 took a different turn by the end of last year when the LTTE leader indicated his readiness for a negotiated settlement. This was confirmed by Erik Solheim, the Norwegian special envoy who talked face-to-face with the leader on 1 November, 2000 in Wanni. He announced afterwards at a press briefing in Colombo that he was convinced of the leader's sincerity in seeking a negotiated political settlement. On November 27, the LTTE leader also made some conciliatory statements not heard before in his annual (Heroes Day) message. This was followed by the self-imposed truce mentioned earlier.

LTTE urged the Government to reciprocate by suspending its military operations and lifting the embargo on the transportation of goods into areas under their control. Government refused saying that a cease-fire would be considered only after some progress is seen in the peace talks. However, the Government in early April allowed some 25 previously banned items including medicines into the rebel territory. The release of some prisoners by both sides also signalled an encouraging sign.

The delegation from the Inter-Religious Alliance for National Unity, who held talks recently with the LTTE near Madhu on their return said the group was willing to give up its demand for a separate state in return for a negotiated and just peace. The religious leaders seemed to have no qualms about the genuineness of the LTTE to negotiate a settlement with the Government. This has also been vouched by all the opposition Tamil parties represented in the Parliament..

Based on past experiences, the view that LTTE's unilateral cease-fire is a ploy to buy time to regroup and reorganise and at the same time to project a soft image as serious peace seekers to the international community prevails among the Sinhalese hardliners. On the other hand, the Tamil sections think that "the Chandrika regime is consistently adhering to its camouflaged strategy of covertly pushing for war while overtly paying lip service to peace."

The Government's moves to boost the firepower of the military should not be overlooked. The $2.5 million worth of tanks, tank transporters and other military vehicles from the Czech Republic that arrived in mid April might have been ordered last year but this is irrelevant to the LTTE right now. The budget allocation of US Dollars 725 million (Rs.63 billion) this year for defence must also be a cause for concern.

Despite the continued military onslaught against the LTTE positions and the campaign to have the LTTE branded worldwide as a terrorist organisation, the LTTE had not resumed major offensive operations against the State and maintained its ceasefire for four months.. In this context, the military offensive launched by the armed forces barely few hours following the expiry of the LTTE ceasefire turned out not only a disaster for the army, but also has produced a climate of renewed confrontation which certainly does not assist the current peace process.

Up until the second week in April, the LTTE's preconditions for taking the Norwegian facilitated process forward were that the Government should reciprocate with a formal cessation of hostilities and the lifting of the economic embargo. For the first time, it was during the discussions between the Norwegian Ambassador Ron Westborg and the LTTE's political wing leader, S P Tamil Chelvam added an additional condition that the Government must lift the proscription of the LTTE imposed in 1998 following the bomb attack on Dalada Maligawa (the sacred Temple of the Tooth) in Kandy.

The reasons for the Government and the LTTE to move in different directions can in the final analysis be assigned to their concerns to be seen entering the negotiations with their power and pride intact. It is understandable that the Government, particularly with the Sinhala hardliners waiting to accuse it for giving in easily to the Tamils is anxious to talk with the LTTE as the triumphant side. It is also understandable that the LTTE wants to be seen as a true and lawful representative of the Tamils participating in talks with the Government on an equal footing. Both sides are also obliged not to let down their soldiers and the families of the thousands who died fighting. If these compulsions are recognised, then the reluctance of each side to accept the other side's conditions can be understood.

In this complex situation, the prospect of creating a congenial climate for peace-making is quite unpromising now. It is obvious that to start the decisive peace talks, Norway's peace efforts must be augmented by diplomatic persuasion and inducements from the international community. The indications are that for observing the ceasefire and also for finalising a political settlement their assistance with the concurrence of India will be needed. Importantly, both sides must have the courage to take some risks for the sake of achieving peace desired by the vast majority of the citizens of the island. ❐

Nutrition Status of Women and Children of Jaffna

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Introduction

The Jaffna district has a population of 502,000. As at December 2000, 42.2% were internally displaced. 89 % of the population of Jaffna had experienced displacement at least once since 1987.

Some of the major displacements that had occurred since 1987 were:

- In May–July 1987, following the "Operation Liberation"
- In October-December, 1987, following the "IPKF operation"
- In June-December, 1995, following "operation sunshine"
- In May-December, 2000, following " Operation ceaseless waves"

The reports of the Government Agent, Jaffna classifies the present population as given in table 1. 202,000 persons were presently displaced.

Table: 1.Population in Jaffna District (as at December 2000)

Population	Number	%
Internally displaced	202,000	40.2
Resettled	245,000	48.8
Not displaced	55,000	11.0
Total	502,000	100.0

Source: Government Agent, Jaffna

In November 2000, there were, 19,507 of them in 154 refugee camps in the Jaffna District, under the supervision of the Government agent. The balance was on their own, living with friends and relations or in rented out annexes or broken down houses of those who had left the district.

A study was carried out recently in the refugee camps in the Jaffna District. The study revealed some interesting facts

The major problem was Undernutrition among children and women.

Children of Jaffna

According to the nutrition survey carried out in 1975/76 (Department of Census & Statistics-1977), 6.6% of the children of Sri Lanka were wasted. Among the 24 districts in Sri Lanka at that time, Jaffna District had the lowest prevalence of wasting of 3.7%. It was almost half of that of the Sri Lankan average.

Table: 2. Prevalence of Undernutrition among children in Refugee camps in Jaffna District

Type of Undernutrition	Percent
Wasted	22.6
Stunted	36.2
Low weight for age	47.7

Source: Sivarajah N. Nutritional Survey of Welfare Centres in Jaffna District. WFP.

The recent survey carried out in the refugee camps in Jaffna District in February/March 2001 showed that 22.6 % of children under 5 years were wasted and 36.2% were stunted. The findings of the study are given in table 2.

A survey carried out in Jaffna in August 2000 (David Becker & Michele Kelly) showed almost similar results (18.9 % were wasted). In this study it was found that among the children 6-17 months old, 30.7% were wasted.

Almost 80% of the mental development of a child takes place during the first two years of a child and Undernutrition during this period could lead to severe impairment of mental development leading to a generation of children with poor mental capacity.

Although 87.3% of the children were born in a hospital, there were 12.7 % children born at home and refugee camps. A trained person did not attend at the time of delivery. In a situation such as this more infants are likely to die around the time of delivery, and more women are likely to have long-term physical effects of the poor management of the delivery

30.3% of the mothers of these children had been displaced from their homes for over 5 years.

Pregnant and lactating mothers

Anaemia is a major nutritional pro-blem among all women. The prevalence of anaemia among pregnant, lactating women and adolescent girls is given in table 3.

56.2% of the adolescent girls between 15 and 19 years of age were anaemic. 26.5% needed active intervention to prevent the development of any severe complications following pregnancy and childbirth. Around 60% of the pregnant and lactating mothers were anaemic.

Table: 3. Percent prevalence of anaemia among pregnant & lactating mothers and adolescent girls.

Degree of anaemia	Pregnant mothers	Lactating mothers	Adolescent girls
Mild	28.8	14.6	29.7
Moderate	28.8	41.8	20.3
Severe	3.4	3.6	6.2
Total	61.0	60.0	56.2

Source: Sivarajah N. Nutritional Survey of Welfare Centres in Jaffna District. WFP.

The number of teenage mothers has increased during the past few decades. It was found that among the pregnant mothers, 15.3 % were under 20 years. 3.4% of the husbands too were under 20 years. Single mothers were not found.

Teenage pregnancies have become a common feature in the refugee camps. Some of the factors contributing to teen-

(continued on page 26)

Religious Sentiment and National Sovereignty: The Case of the Bamiyan Buddhas

Rohini Hensman

The worldwide dismay and outrage caused by Taliban's edict of February 26 ordering the demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas raise a host of questions of a very fundamental nature. While such extreme defiance of world opinion is characteristic of Taliban, this kind of behaviour-and the reasoning which justifies it-is by no means unique. Indeed, it has been extremely common in South Asia. I would therefore like to take two specific issues raised by this episode and look at the wider questions they pose. The first is that of religious sentiment and what it can or cannot justify; the second is that of national sovereignty.

The justification offered for what most of us would see as an act of religious intolerance and pure vandalism is that these 'graven images' offend the religious sentiments of Taliban. Their supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar dismissed criticisms of the plan, saying that Afghan Muslims should be proud of smashing the statues. 'It is a shame for those Afghans who criticise this decrce,' he was quoted as saying; 'I ask Afghans and the world's Muslims to use their sound wisdomŠ Do you prefer to be a breaker of idols or a seller of idols? Is it appropriate to bi influenced by the propaganda of the infidels?'

South Asian Atrocities

Unfortunately, their action is not in a class by itself, but in a class all too familiar to us in South Asia. The demolition of the Babri Mosque in 1992, the threat of demolishing other mosques and the burning of the Kuran in India, the torching of Christian churches in India and Sri Lanka, attacks on Uindu temples in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, attacks on Buddhist, Muslim and Christian religious sites by the LTTF.: such acts of vandalism have been common in our countries. Worse still, pogroms and massacres of people belonging to minority religions have routinely been carried out. In India, anti-Muslim pogroms have been endemic since the partition riots at Independence, and more recently, Christians have become the target of violence and murder, as they have been for many years in Pakistan. Hindus have been attacked in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Repeated pogroms in Sri Lanka have been directed against non-Buddhists. The LTTE has massacred Buddhists and Muslims. There have been slanderous attacks throughout South Asia on historians and archeologists standing up for the truth about a multicultural past, and the buming of Jaffna library with its rare manuscripts in 1981 is one example of the attempts made to erase the evidence of such a past. Of course, no survey is ever carried out to aicertain that all or even the majority of those following the supposedly offendcd religion approvc of the brutal acts carried out in their namc. Nonetheless, thosc who engage in them implicitly take it for granted that their own rcligious sensibilities plovide ajustification tor physical attacks on structures and people of other religions.

Obnoxious Fanatcism

So what-apart from the publicity it has received and the historical and artistic value of the monuments-makes the attack on the Bamiyan Buddhas any different from innumerable other assaults on religious monuments and places of worship in our countries? The answer is that in principle, there is no difference. The vandals who set fire to a Christian church in Hingurakgoda were, by the same logic which inspired that act, justifying the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas. And conversely, the Taliban clerics, by their action, justify in retrospect the demolition of the Babri Masjid by Hindu vandals. Are they aware that the hatred which inspires their actions can equally well be used against their own religion? Probably not, because those who appeal to religious sentiment generally believe that their own religion and their own sentiments are the only valid ones. They even dismiss other versions of thcir own religion which are more humanistic and tolerant as being inauthentic.

For those of us who believe in human rights, equality and democracy, what would a logical, consistent position on such questions be? At one extreme is the belief, usually characterised as Marxist though not all Marxists agree with it, that religious belief is ideology or superstition, to be discouraged and discounted. While this is perfectly aceeptable as one belief (among others), wherever it results in similar actions to those inspired by religious fanaticism -destruction of religious places of worship and monuments, persccution of followers of a religion or religions, ctc.-it is equally obnoxious. Like religious intolerance, this amounts to a denial of fundamental human rights to freedom of conscience and freedom of expression.

Liberal Dilemma

At the other extreme is a libera position, embodied in various differen forms. One is the Gandhian-inspire conception of secularism commonly accepted in India, which preaches equal tolerance and respect to all religions, but therc are also more recent, even post-modem, forms of the same outlook. Before looking at this position more closely, a small digression on what we mean by 'religion'. A recent issue of Pravada (Vol.6 Nos.9 & 10) carries an interesting debate between Qadri Ismail, who alleges that in Michael Ondaalje's novel Anil's Ghost, 'Buddhism is denied a role the politics of Sri Lanka, in the Sinhala oppression of the Minoritics.. its criminal record in Sri Lanka (is) denied' (p.29), and Radhika Coomaraswamy, who alleges that Ismail 'collapses Buddhist humanism and Buddhist chauvinism into one category' (p.29). In a sense, both are right-or, if they feel their positions are mutually exclusive, both are wrong. Questions about the actual teachings of the founder of a religion, and the extent to which the practiccs of followers conform to those teachings, are important lo pursue. But religion as a social

institution includes the practices of all those who profess a certain faith, regardless of whether they conforn to or deviate from the teachings of the founder. In this sense, Buddhism as practised in Sri Lanka is both a religion of peace and compassion as well as a religion of bloodthirsty violence, and it is true that the latter dimension is absent from Ondaatje's novel, making the entire action inexplicable, since there is no way of accounting for the honrific violence of a state avowedly committed to Buddhism. 1 Seen from this perspective, a liberal position of according equal tolerance and respect to all religious beliefs and practices shows itself to be self-contradictory and unviable. It would mean respecting the right of Buddhists to venerate the Bamiyan statues as well as the right of Taliban to demolish them. Supposedly safeguarding freedom of conscience, it would actually do the opposite in many cases. The dominant version of most religions usually involves some degree of violation of the rights of women and girls, ranging from exclusion, discrimination and patriarchal control to sadistic violence such as female gcnital mutilation, institutionalised sexual abuse of minors (in devadasi and other cults) and the buming alive of 'witches' and widows. Why should anyone -whether followers of those religions or not-tolerate, much less respect, such beliefs and practices? Freedom of conscience in such cases must surely include the right to denounce and campaign against them! Heroic examples of such defiance are provided in Afghanistan itself, where AFN (the Afghan Women's Network) and RAWA (the Revolutionary Associalion of the Women of Afghanistan) have been putting up a courageous and inspiring resistance to Taliban's horrific oppression of women We cannot accord equal respect to these women's organisalions and Taliban. We have to choose.

Secular States

Where innocuous beliefs and practices are concerned, toleration is certainly desirable, but not necessarily respect. We might desist from expressing certain opinions in public, but we cannot so easily convince ourselves that such opinions are wrong. If certain religious beliefs or practices appear to someone as superstitious or irrational, that person is surely entitled to hold and even express such an opinion, even if it offends someone else's religious sensibilities. Thus if the Taliban clerics had confined themselves to a philosophical or theological critique of idol-worship, no one could have faulted them. Freedom of exprcssion entitles them to express such opinions, just as the same freedom of expression entitles Salman Rushdie to criticise or even ridicule some of their own beliefs. Where practices do not harm anyone, democracy requires both that they can be practised freely, and that they can be criticised freely, while practices that do inflict damage on others should be punished. This is why a dcmocratic state has to be secular, and no state which is associated with a particular religion can ever be considered to be democratic. The human rights abuses of Taliban are matched by those of the Israeli state, which was established and maintains itself through genocidal violence against Palestinians. The problem in this case cannot be solved purely through the establishment of a secular, democratic Palestinian state; the solution has to include the secularisation and democratisation of thc Israeli state too.

So our attitude to practices inspired by religious sentiment need not be different from our attitude to any other activities. Where they are violent and destructive, they should be opposed and condemned, and, if possible, punished; religious sentiment is no excuse for criminal actions, although it might, like temporary insanity, be considered a mitigating circumstance while sentencing. Where they are innocuous, practitioners should have the freedom to engage in them while sceptics should also have thc freedom to criticise them. And where they promote, Justice, peace and solidarity, we should support them.

National Sovereignty

The second fundamental issue raised by this case is that of national sovereignty. Die-hard supporters of this principle would have to argue that as the Buddhas are located on the soil of Afghanistan, the de facto rulers of that nation-namely Taliban- are entitled to do as they wish with them, and no one from outside the nation has any right to interfere. This, indeed, is the stand taken by Taliban Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmed Mutawakel, who said that he would meet United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan in Pakistan in order to 'tell him that what we are doing is an intemal religious issue.'

It is clear, however, that most of the rest of thc world does not agree with him. A UN General Assembly resolution sponsored by over 100 nations and approved by consensus on March 9 urged Taliban to take immediate action to prevent further destruction of these and other monuments. Evidently the intemational community is very much concerned about what happens on Afghan soil, and the implicit message is that the Taliban clerics do not have the right to destroy these statues which happen to be located in their country. This in turn implies limits to national sovereignty, understood as the right of a state to do as it wishes within its national borders.

Universal Declaration

The first hint of a challenge to the doctrine of national sovereignty came in the wake of the Second World War and in the shadow of the Holocaust. Article 1 of the UN Charter, signed in June 1945, affirms that 'promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction' would be one of the UN's principle purposes, but this recognition of rights and freedoms that cut across national borders is tempered, even contradicted, by the affirmation of national sovereignty as a principle. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN (ieneral Assembly on December 10, 1945 goes further, explicitly linking respect for human rights with the maintenance of international peace. What we see here is the beginnings of international law as a system over-riding national sovereignty. While in practice a state may be able to violate the fundamental rights of its own citizens-as, indeed, it can violate the rights of citizens of other nations if it is powerful enough-in principle, these actions are subject to intemational scrutiny and condemnation. Nation-states continue to be the constitutive units of today's world, but they are understood to be part of a wider international community. Human rights

NGOs like Amnesty Intemational and Human Rights Watch, as well as smaller local organisations, act as watchdogs and whistle-blowers, alerting us to violations in every comer of the world. And a plethora of human rights conventions- on the rights of refugees, women, ethnic minoritics, children, and so forth-have further developed intemational law.

Cultural Heritage

Other concems have also increasingly come to be recognised as universal. The environment, for example. It is now-well known that the destruction of forests in one country and emission of greenhouse gases in a second can cause the partial or even complete submersion of a third. The earth and its atmosphere did not come into being predivided into nations, nor has it yet learned to respect national borders. The environment is by its very nature global, and given that what goes on in one country can have devastating consequences for another, it makes sense to work towards global regulation. Another area where global regulation has come to be seen as desirable is basic workers' rights. In a globalised world economy where the denial of such rights in some countries can erode thcm in others, it has been argued, at least the fundamental rights embodied in the ILO Core conventions should be implemented in all countries. Finally, the outrage felt by many non- Buddhists all over the world at the fate of the Bamiyan Buddhas implies a belief that these monulments are part of the cultural heritage of humankind as a whole. The awareness is growing that whether we like it or not, we are all part of one human family, sharing the earth as our common home. The major problem faced by all these UN and ILO Conventions on human rights, workers', women's and children's rights, the environment, and so forth, is of course the lack of any machinery for enforcement. Recently, however, some progress has been made on this front, with the with the Intemational Criminal Tribunal for ex-Yugoslavia (set up in 1993) and International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (set up in 1994) trying and prosecuting several individuals for war crimcs, including rape. The agreement by the UN in July 1998 to sct up a permanent Intemational Criminal Court to take up cnmcs against humanity, war erimes and genoeide would, if it is implemented, take this proeess a step further. Since 22 December 2000, women can complain directly to the UN about discrimination, sexual exploitation, or other violations of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. The idea of intemational bodies that not only promote respect for basie rights of all inhabitants of the earth, but also have the power to punish those who violate these rights, is gaining ground.

Should the notion of national sovereignty be abandoned altogether, then? In a world which still consists of nation-states, such an extreme measure seems premature. I would suggest, instead, a notion of national sovereignty that is analogous to parental rights. There was a time when what went on inside the family was considered to be no business of anyone outside. Today, thanks to the feminist movement, this notion is no longer so common. But there are still problems regarding the protection of children's rights, partly because children, especially little ones, are not capable of safeguarding their own interests. In this context, parental rights can be seen as the right of parents to love, protect and care for their children, and to be provided with the facilities which enable them to do so (paid parental leave when children are born or fall sick, etc.). But these are not rights over their children, who are independent persons with rights of their own. Thus parents do not have the right to exploit, abuse, sell or kill their children, and society has a duty to intervene if any of these things are happening.

By analogy, we can think ot national sovereignty as the right and duty of a state to protect itself and its citizens from foreign aggression and to care for residents (including foreigners) as well as plant and animal life, historical and cultural artifacts, and the environment, within its borders. This means, of course, that a state does not have the right to attack any of these things outside its borders; but it does not imply that it has the right to attack and destroy them even within its borders. For example, according to these criteria, the Iraqi state should legitimately protect its own air space from intrusion by foreign military aircraft, and the US and UK bombing of Iraq as recently as February 16th would be totally illegitimate. But attacks by the Iraqi state against religious and ethnic minorities and dissidents within its own borders would be equally illegitimate. Setting up international institutions and devising procedures that can enforce compliance with such principles is the challenge facing us today. Protecting religious sites and humankind's cultural heritage from the kind of vandalism which has received so much publicity in Afghanistan, but is also evident in Sri Lanka and the rest of South Asia, would be part of that agenda.

End Note

1. I am not going to enter the debate about this novel, but cannot refrain from saying that while I am sure Radhika is right about Ondaatje's humanist credentials, I share Qadri Ismail's discomfort at the treatment of Tamils in it. I cannot agree with either, however, that Gamini Diyasena is a sympathetic character. I find him a good example of the staggering failure of imagination, ignorance of what is happening in one's own country, and ingrained prejudice that is largely responsible for starting the war and keeping it going by refusing to ackowledge the legitimate grievances of Tamils. While reflecting on the damage caused by terroist bombs (pp. 132-3), it did not occur to him that far greater camage had been caused by government bombing and shelling and STF massacres in the North and East-in fact, he asks 'And you want to investigate the government?' as though there is something perverse about this! When treating young boys who were members of the LTTE, 'He had to keep reminding himself who these people were,' namely, people who put 'bombs on crowded streets, in bus stations, paddy fields, schools' (p.220), but never even tried to imagine the trauma suffered at the hands of Sri Lankan security forces that might have pushed these children into the arms of the Tigers. In the absenee of such an attempt, we are forced to conclude that 'these people' are like this by nature, because they were born this way: a racist conclusion if ever there was one! With such an outlook, he is incapable of combatting the violence; his medical work can at best alleviate the symptoms without ever curing the disease.

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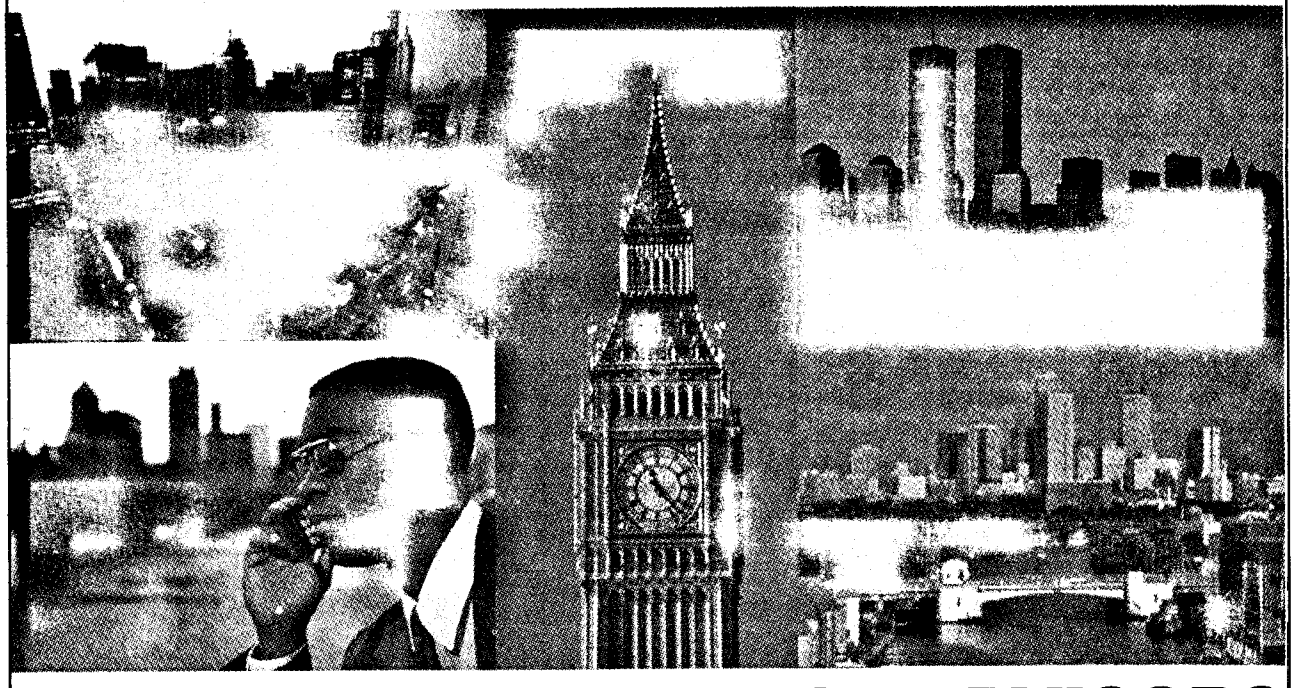

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Jayalalitha Returns With Massive Majority

T.N.Gopalan

It is a come-back with a vengeance. 53-year-old Jayalalitha Jayaram stunned friends and foes like as the AIADMK coasted to an awesome triumph, bagging as many as 132 seats in the 234-member Assembly. Her allies notched up another 64 seats, leaving a pitiful 36 for the DMK-led front.

It is a massive majority. The Tamil voters have lived up to their reputation of handing down a decisive mandate for any one party or another, leaving no ambiguity or hung assembly in their trail.

She is grinning, perhaps licking her chops as well at the sweet thought of whatever she could do to her bete noire Karunanidhi. Hardly a year ago she had vowed to destroy his clan, root, branch and tree, if she came to power.

There was some lingering doubt as to whether she would be sworn in as the Chier Minister because of her conviction in cases involving corruption which led to her disqualification from contesting in the election. But she is now Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, and there is no question that she has been forgiven by the people's court.

It is now clear that she would not go behind the bars for any of the crimes she has been charged with and convicted for.

For Karunanidhi, generally hailed as a Machiavelian in recognition of his formidable craftiness, it is indeed a bitter swan song. The 77-year old DMK chief had made it amply clear that this would be the last polls he would be actively campaigning in and thrown in enough hints that he was grooming his son M.K.Stalin to succeed him.

Neither would he bow out of office guns blazing nor would he have the satisfaction of seeing his dear son enthroned.

It was virtually a massacre for the DMK, many of its leading lights falling by the wayside, others managing to scrape through. The leaders of the casteist formations whom the DMK took into its front came to grief too.

While Karunanidhi and Stalin won rather comfortably from city constituencies, party general secretary nominal number 2 K.Anbazhagan squeaked past his rivals by a razor thin margin of 300-odd votes. Deputy Speaker of the Assembly Parithi Ilamvazhudhi was declared winner by a much narrower margin of 85 votes in another city constituency which has been a DMK bastion for long, a seat bagged by Ilamvazhudhi even during the more humiliating rout of 1991.

The man who made him huff and puff was John Pandian, a Dalit leader, known for his strong-arm tactics. Hailing from the south, he has no base worth speaking of in the city and was rewarded with a seat by Jayalalitha only because he is seen as a Pallar caste leader who could take on the more formidable Dr.Krishnaswamy of the Pudhiya Thamizhakam.

The DMK lost four of the 14 seats in the capital, that itself some indication of the agonizing times the DMK is going through. Most of the cabinet ministers including the well-respected Speaker P.T.R.Palanivel Rajan have bitten the dust.

Dalit leader Krishnaswamy has lost in both the constituencies he contested from, A former cabinet colleague of Jayalalitha, S.Kannappan leading the Makkal Thamizh Desam (MTD) which seeks to mobilize the Yadavas, A.C.Shanmugam of the New Justice Party, touted as a party of the forward caste Mudaliars, J.M.Haroon of the Muslim Jamaath have all been defeated. Only person to escape the wrath of the people was Thirumavalavan of the Dalit Panthers of India who won narrowly from Mangalur in northern Tamil Nadu.

The suave former finance minister P.Chidambaram who broke away from the TMC protesting the alliance with the AIADMK and campaigned energetically for the DMK-front had the satisfaction of seeing two of his hand-picked men emerging victorious.

The DMK's final tally was less than thirty seats. What a fall from its whopping 173 seat triumph last time.

In the AIADMK front, the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) made handsome gains. Against the four seats it had won in the last elections, contesting independently, it has bagged seats, this time as a key ally of the AIADMK.

Though Dr.Ramadoss has been able to help Jaya Amma win a number of

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age pregnancies are the overcrowding and increased opportunities for young people to meet each other.

The parents are also keen to get their daughters married early because of the uncertainty that prevails. Most of the girls are married after it is realized that they are pregnant. They are in most instances married to their boy friends who are also immature and without any source of income. The parents have to support them. Most of these marriages are likely to break up.

Most of the girls who are married have been school dropouts.

The future

The future of these children and women is bleak. They are liable to succumb to illnesses and die. The anaemic girls will be anaemic mothers very soon, who would die as a result of childbirth. When they deliver their babies, they will be low birth weight babies who will succumb to infections or be physically or mentally handicapped. Already the maternal mortality and infant mortality in the war-torn Northeast is higher than the rest of the country.

The long-term effects of Undernutrition and anaemia will be disastrous with poor physical and mental development. Teachers in schools complain of children frequently fainting in the classrooms. Most of them come to school without breakfast and they are not sure of the lunch.

If a catastrophe is to be averted, immediate and active intervention is necessary. The situation is urgent.

The war against undernutrition must start immediately and continue. We cannot wait till Peace arrives. ❐

seats in the northern districts, she has not been able to return the compliment in Pondicherry union territory where the PMK leader has not been able to realize his dream of installing his own nominee as the Chief Minister. In fact the PMK has been routed there, failing to win even a single seat. It is the Congress which could form the government.

Even the ailing G.Karuppiah Moopanar has managed to infuse some life into what was thought to be a dying party, the Tamil Maanila Congress. The TMC and its mother party, the Congress, won 30 seats in all.

The two communist parties too have notched up eleven seats between them. Overall it has been a very satisfying performance for her allies, though in private conversations, they express their apprehensions as to the possible impact of Jayalalitha's thumping victory.

"Certainly we didn't expect this kind of a sweep...There's no knowing whether she would not be back to her arrogant and autocratic ways, but at the moment we have the satisfaction of worsting Karunanidhi who betrayed the secular cause," observed a communist leader.

Jayalalitha herself, in her moment of victory, sought to put on an uncharacteristic show of humility, repeating her mentor MGR's mantra, "Makkal theerpei mahesan theerpu..." (People's verdict is god's own.)

She did not talk of wreaking revenge on Karunanidhi during a brief interaction with media. She only promised to "put the state back on the rails." Though she once again accused the DMK of acting out of vendetta against her, she conceded that the economic difficulties faced by the people might have played a key role in the DMK's defeat.

She avoided a direct response to the inevitable question on her plans to stake her claims to form the government, but in an interview to a TV channel, she observed, "If I opt out, it'd be unfair to the people who voted so massively for my front only in the hope of seeing me as the next Chief Minister."

Karunanidhi in his rather brief statement sardonically remarked that it was perhaps the reward of the people for his good governance and claimed that the voters had been fooled by the false propaganda that he had conspired to have Jayalalitha disqualified.

In the last Assembly elections the anger against the then Jayalalitha regime was widespread and quite visible, though the scale of her debacle was not expected.

In 1991 the people were protesting the Rajiv assassination, in 1989 the AIADMK split clearly meant that Karunanidhi was staging a come-back. In 1984 it was a double sympathy wave – following the assassination of Mrs.Gandhi and MGR's illness, and one can go on right back to 1967 which ushered in the first non-Congress government.

If in 1991, the AIADMK sweep was attributed to the Rajiv assassination, a comment she resented strongly, there is no doubt who is the architect of the AIADMK victory this time. She had fielded fresh faces in most of the constituencies, still her party lost in only eight constituencies.

It may be useful to recall here that in the local body elections held in 1996 the AIADMK was hard put to find candidates and that in many places those chosen fought shy of even using Jayalalitha's pictures. Since then she has come a long way despite convictions in three different cases.

After all she had bounced back remarkably even by the 1998 Lok Sabha polls – if the victory then was attributed to the alliance she had hitched up, the very next year she almost carried on her own steam and put up a reasonably decent performance. From then to the present situation wherein she is a runaway winner, it is but a logical culmination of the process that had started three years ago.

The AIADMK's defeat in all the three by-elections last year could be attributed to the public revulsion in the wake of the ghastly Dharmapuri bus-burning.

Otherwise she had begun to hog all the opposition space for herself, what with the TMC being seen too weak a player to fight the DMK.

Now the question is why should the people look for an anti-DMK party in the first place when Karunanidhi's government had been relatively responsive and less corrupt than the previous one?

The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance would have to bear the cross for the havoc wrought by the new economic policies of the Vajpayee regime.

Coimbatore could be fast turning into a ghost city. The entire textile industry including those who make the machinery and the spare parts is in doldrums. Handloom and powerloom are badly affected. That there are no suicides like in Andhra Pradesh is only some small mercy. The prospect of privatisation has turned the workers of the prestigious Salem steel plant hostile to the NDA government. The prices of farm produce, both cereals and cash crops, are declining, and the agriculturists are agitated.

Thanks to the general economic downturn, money flow is drying up. During the campaign, if you asked anyone on the street what was their major grievance against the government, the invariable answer was, "Aiya...panapuzhakkam illeenga..." (There is no liquidity at all.).

This correspondent tried to impress upon a person that such a phenomenon was nationwide, perhaps worldwide too and that Jayalalitha herself might not be able to set it right. Pat came the response, "Never mind, we'll give her a chance...Am sure she would bring good luck with her.." A sentiment echoed by many in the state, especially in the lower and middle strata.

That for a whole host of reasons she had sewn up the support of the Thevars in the south and Vanniars in the North was another point in her favour. Even the Naadars could have been with her thanks to the TMC's support though there was quite a considerable heartburn over seat allocation. Muslims of course would have votee largely against the NDA.

The alliance with Dalit outfits might have created a new constituency for the DMK, but by the same token possibly the move could be said to have further alienated the Thevar and Vanniar votebanks as well as some other intermediate castes too.

The point also remains that Jayalalitha has succeeded in a significant measure in whipping up the dormant anti-Karunanidhi feelings among the people and positioning herself as the only leader who could take him on.

Such anti-Karunanidhi feelings had

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Tamil Nationalism And Elections in Tamil Nadu

Suresh Nambath

CHENNAI, MAY 6. Although fringe groups in Tamil Nadu took advantage of Tamil chauvinist demands of forest brigand, Veerappan, during the Rajkumar kidnap episode, mainstream political parties have found no use for Tamil nationalism in the Assembly election campaign.

Far from reviving Tamil nationalist sentiments, Veerappan and his extremist friends only made political parties wary of any talk of Tamil nationalism or the issue at its core now: the question of supporting Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka.

Not surprisingly, the biggest voice against Tamil nationalism, the AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, is not making noise on the subject now. Apart from attacking "extremism and secessionism", she is doing very little to link the DMK with Veerappan and Tamil nationalist secessionism. With the DMK itself not enthusiastic about Tamil nationalism, Opposition parties can hope to derive only minimal political mileage.

As might be expected, the fringe outfits led by the Tamil Nationalist Movement leader, Mr. P. Nedumaran, have attempted to use the election as an opportunity to make themselves heard. But, not even the smaller mainstream political parties sympathetic to the Tamil nationalist cause, MDMK and PMK, are ready to reorient their campaign.

Besides the lack of public support, alliance politics appears to have tempered Tamil nationalist sentiments. The MDMK, as an ally of the BJP at the Centre, cannot afford to push the issue beyond a point. And the PMK, as an ally of the AIADMK, does not want to embarrass Ms. Jayalalitha. In any case, Tamil nationalism is now LTTE-centric in Tamil Nadu. Fringe groups and the MDMK and the PMK are supportive of the LTTE. Tamil nationalism independent of the LTTE and the Eelam struggles does not seem to have any space in the State. Veerappan did nothing to add to the already strong links of Tamil nationalist groups with the LTTE. Actually, he gave a 'local flavour' to the Tamil nationalist cause raising issues such as the Cauvery dispute during the kidnap drama. With support from the fringe groups, he tried to make Tamil nationalism, which was in danger of being subsumed by the Sri Lankan issue, more 'Tamil Naduish'.

Indeed, nothing explains the isolation of the Tamil nationalist groups more than their making use of Veerappan to gain space in the public sphere.

However, it is not as if Tamil nationalism was always a dirty word that raised visions of only the LTTE and Veerappan. Not very long ago, during the time of the emergence of the DMK as a major party in the 1950s and 1960s, Tamil nationalism was a rallying point for large sections of Tamil Nadu trying to mobilise themselves against a minority elite.

In the period immediately after its inception, the DMK began talking of Tamil nationalism and separatism as part of an identity politics against the elite. The anti-north Indian, anti- Brahmin and anti-Hindi rhetoric was intended to unite 95 per cent of the people, 'the Tamils', against an identifiable elite.

All the three different strands of the Dravidian movement (anti- north Indian, anti-Brahmin and anti-Hindi) then represented real interests of a vast majority.

But the very success of the movement, the assertion of the intermediate castes and the middle class, meant its losing steam. And now, from a clarion call, Tamil nationalism is reduced to a dirty word. ❐

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been sedulously fostered by MGR for over two and a half decades. Those days he and his minions would parrot from platform after platform that Karunanidhi "is a poisonous force".

The actor-turned-politician had to make out his rival to be a monstrous villain in order to perpetuate his own hold on power. The message sunk deep in to the psyche of the Tamil masses, never completely obliterated since, despite the statesmanlike persona worn by the DMK chief.

After all the 1969-71 and 1971-76 Karunanidhi regimes were everything a decent government should not be.

What next from here? Will she be a changed person? Has she learnt the right lessons from all the ordeals she has undergone?

While she might have realized the merits in real politik, the need to bend, if ever so slightly, in order to forge a winning combination, there is no sign that the impatient and intolerant megalomaniac in her is anywhere near metamorphosing into a more pleasant and democratic personality. ❐

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'Flowers Will Always Bloom'

Sujeeva Nivunhella

"My father died in a bomb blast and we became refugees. We hated the Sinhalese until Sunethra madam gave us this chance. Now I have both Sinhala and Muslim friends. Earlier, we blamed the Sinhalese army for everything that happened to us. Today I blame both sides."

Thangeshwari is one of the players in "Flowers will always bloom," a Sunera Foundation production. Most of the 45 actors and actresses in this powerful drama are disabled. Some are refugees. For most of them, their flight to London was the first time in an airplane.

The group, which included four professional artistes, arrived in London a month ago and billeted at a hotel in Hammersmith. They quickly adapted to unfamiliar surroundings.

Thangeshwari said she was living in the Thirukkovil refugee camp when she was discovered" by the Sunera Foundation of Ms. Bandaranaike and trained as an actress. She is grateful to Ms. Bandaranaike and the foundation for giving her undreamed of opportunities that had enabled her to meet people of other communities.

One of the curses of Sri Lanka's separatist war that has now dragged on for nearly 20 years is that Tamil children born after 1983 do not know that the three communities inhabiting in our island home - Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslims - are living in amity outside the war zone.

Upul Samantilleke, also an actor in the drama, was a soldier in the Sri Lanka Army who lost both his legs in the north. Asked how he felt acting in this play with Tamil refugees, he had this to say: "I joined the army to do a job and that was to safeguard my country. Here we live together like one family and we do not have any differences."

Liz Philipson, who is coordinating the performances in the UK, got all members of the company down to the hotel lobby and told them how to use the hot and cold water taps in their hotel bathrooms, how to use the elevator, what they should do in case of a fire and lots of other useful details necessary for people unfamiliar with the accommodation in a London hotel.

They were also given body lotions and lip balm to protect themselves from the cold.

It's not all work and no play for these 45 visitors to London. They have been already to the Lego Land theme park and enjoyed their day out despite light rain and a temperature of 13 degrees centigrade.

The group attracted a packed audience to their three performances at Riverside Studios and the general verdict was "unbelievable." About 90% of those who attended were British and all those who saw the superb performance completely forgot that the majority of the players are disabled. There was prolonged standing ovations at the end of each show.

Ms. Sunethra Bandaranaike said that the Sunera Foundation was launched about two years ago with a vision to unite all the people of Sri Lanka. Her wish is to see all communities in Sri Lanka living in harmony.

"For the last 18 years there has been no political solution to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka. I think a great deal can be done through art to help bring about peace in our homeland," she said.

"We should not leave aside the disabled. We should share things with them. It was a good idea to include refugees into this group. By doing that I think we started some sort of a healing process and they stopped looking at you suspiciously."

She said that the British government had funded the foundation to train 30 more people and they will recruit players from all parts of the country - north to south, west to east. The current production was all about war and they plan a new production with a new theme next December.

"We are always talking about 'the burning issue.' If we can contribute to improve conditions in the country even in a small way, we would be very happy," she said.

The co-director of the production, Wolfgang Stange of the AMICI Dance Theatre Company of London first visited Sri Lanka in 1974 when he was invited to see children of the Cheshire Home in Negombo perform. He saw some disabled children watching the play but not taking part and that day he thought to himself "I must find a way of bringing such kids into the performing arts."

Stange felt that the plight of the refugees in Sri Lanka had not been discussed properly and with the help of Sunethra Bandaranaike managed to get some real refugees into "Flowers will always bloom."

He said it was his dream to bring the production to London. "I wanted to share my experience with my people here and it was possible to do so to celebrate the 21st anniversary of the Integrated Theatre in London."

"This was a tremendous new experience for everybody concerned. How quickly they adapted was miraculous. The majority of the players had never ever been to Colombo," he said.

Rohana Deva Perera, the other co-director, said that he had always wanted to do something for the under-privileged and that brought him into this project. He would like to thank his actress wife, Ramani Damayanthi, for giving the fullest support to his endeavour.

Perera said that the players included refugees from the Thirukkovil camp and disabled soldiers from Rana Viru Sevana, Ragama. "When we brought this production to London we had some reservations of how audiences would react. I never expected a standing ovation and was overwhelmed," he said.

Perera also said there were people who wrongly accused them of using NGO funds for this project. "I admit that some NGOs act only for their well being. But don't forget, art did not survive in the world without the help of donors."

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WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent wedding.

Vamini *daughter of Mr. & Mrs. N. Vamadevan of 1 Sterry Drive, Thames Ditton, Surrey KT7 0YN and* **Ramesh** *son of Mr. & Mrs. Gunarajali of 33 Bayham Road, Morden, Surrey SM4 5JH on 21st April 2001 at Civic Suite, Wandsworth Town Hall, London SW18.*

Kethesh *son of Kandiah & Shamala Thiruchendurnathan of 44 The Warren, Carshalton Beeches, Surrey SM5 4EH and* **Seran** *daughter of Eshref and Emine Mehmet of 26 East Drive, Carshalton Beeches, Surrey SM5 4PB on 29th April 2001 at Fairfield Halls, Croydon, Surrey.*

OBITUARIES

Rosebell Packiamalar Mathiaparanam *(24.07.1912 – 13.05.2000)*

Chelvi Mathiaparanam *(23.02.1943 – 15.09.2000)*

Mrs. Mathiaparanam and daughter Chelvi came from a distinguished Christian family in Jaffna. Mr. K.E. Mathiaparanam was a greatly respected teacher at Jaffna College for several years. Some years before his death the eldest son Thilakam was 'called home'. From this family the survivors are Rev. Seelan Mathiaparanam who is a Pastor in Coimbatore, India. He lives with his wife and young daughter. The younger daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mathiaparanam Arul, who is a teacher lives in Mount Lavinia in Sri Lanka. There is also a young son Chelvan Mathiaparanam in Sri Lanka.

It is possible that many have not yet heard of the death of Mrs Mathiaparanam and her daughter Chelvi. **Contact address of Rev. S. Mathiaparanam:- Site 31, Meena Estate, Coimbatore 28, South India.**

Dr. Nagalingam Kandasamy, *retired General Practitioner, Liverpool; dearly beloved husband of Vadivambikai; loving father of Indraranjan, Anushia and Krishnamuhunthan; father-in-law of Kathryn and Indrakumar; brother of N. Vellupillai and N. Kumarasamy; brother-in-law of Kethies Thuraisingham, Thevakie Karunakaran, Yasothai Sivathondan, Radha Ruthiramoorthy, Sathiapama, Nandapalan Thuraisingham, Saroja and Swarna; devoted grandfather of Anita, Tanya, Oliver and Lauren passed away on Friday, 16th March 2001. Funeral took place on Saturday, 24th March in Sutton, Surrey.*

The family are sincerely grateful to friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes, messages of sympathy and assisted in numerous ways during the period of great sorrow.

Born: 21.03.1933
Died: 09.04.2001

Mrs Seethaluxsmy Palasundaram, *Trustee, Merton Volunteer Bureau, former Headmistress, St. Angela's Junior School, Brunei; beloved wife of late Mr. Palasundaram (former teacher St. Patrick's College Jaffna, Drieberg College Chavakacheri, Prince of Wales College Moratuwa and Anthony Abela College Brunei);second daughter of late Mr. & Mrs. Markandu (Malaysia); eldest daughter-in-law of late Dr. A. Suppiah (Tellippalai); sister of late Mahalingam, Mahadeva, Poornam (Sydney), Pushkala and Saroja (Chunnakam); sister-in-law of Dr. Arumainayagam (Epidemiologist), Nadarajah, Rajendram, late Dr. S. Balakrishnan (Perth), late Rajaluxsmy, Jeyaluxsmy (Sydney) and Saraswathy passed away on 9th April 2001 and the funeral took place on 19th April attended by the Mayor of Merton and members of the Merton Volunteer Bureau.*

The members of the family wish to express their sincere thanks to all those who helped and comforted during the painful period of Seetha's untimely and tragic death. – 47 Springfield Avenue, Merton Park, London SW20 9JR. Tel: 0208 542 3225.

Mrs Sellam Rattinam *beloved wife of the late Mr. Sayambunather Vyramuttu Rattinam; daughter of the late Mr. V. Sithamparapillai and Meenatchipillai; daughter-in-law of the late Mr. S. Vyramuttu and Paruvathipillai all of Pannalai, Tellippalai; loving mother of Pathmanathan, Ramanathan and Loganathan; mother-in-law of Vasuki, Vijeyaladchumy and Thanaledchmi; grandmother of Vijayaluxmi Thevakumar (Australia), Senthooran, Bhavan, Kugan, Asha-Vidthya and Sathian; great grandmother of Krishni and Vishala (both of Australia) passed away peacefully aged 80 in UK on 9th May 2001. Her last rites and final farewell took place on 13th May in the UK according to Hindu rites.*

The members of the family extend their grateful thanks to all friends, relatives, members of the Saiva Munnetta Sangam (UK), Temple and other organisations who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy, floral tributes and offered assistance in several ways during the period of great sorrow. - 3 The Orchard, Wickford, Essex SS12 OHB, UK. Tel: (01268) 766624, Fax: (01268) 561805.

IN MEMORIAM

Mrs Ranjini Geetanjali Thirunavukarasu *on the fifth anniversary of her passing away on 24th May 1996.*

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her husband Thirunavukarasu; children Poornima and Pradeep; father Mahalingam; mother-in-law Mrs. P. Ponnuthurai; sisters Mrs Lalitha Dilkushi Karunakaran and Priyadarshini Damayanthy; brothers Premkumar, Mohanakumar, Ranjitkumar, Nimalkumar and Tilakumar; brothers-in-law Karunakaran and Balanathan; sisters-in-law Kamalarani, Vijayalaxmi, Nirmala, Yasothara, Nalini, Kamaladevi and Sugirthadevi - M. Ranjitkumar, 12 Chase Lane, Barkingside, Essex IG6 1BH. Tel: 020 8554 2095.

In ever loving memory of **Dr. Parameswaran Kandiah** *on the eleventh anniversary of his passing away on 12th May 1990.*

Eleven years have rolled by since the passing away of a much dedicated doctor, a loving husband and father. To have lived and known a man such as him is surely an inspiration to bring out the goodness and the kindness in us all. God bless you.

Sorrowfully remembered by his beloved wife Pathmaseni and loving children Thayalan and Anjali. – 29 Mounstan Close, Hartside Grange, Hartlepool TS26 OLR.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Jun 1st, 4th, 5th & 8th *11am to 1.pm Religious Discourses by Swami Yogeswarananda at London Tamil Centre, 253 East Lane, Wembley, Middx HA0 3NN. Tel: 020 8908 2646.*

Jun 1 *Feast of St. Justin.*

Jun 2 *Eekathasi; South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) Trip to Worthing. Tel: 020 8542 3285.*

Jun 3 *Pirathosam.*

Jun 4 *Vaikasi Visakam.*

Jun 5 *Full Moon Day; Feast of St. Bonifice.*

Jun 6 *Feast of St. Norbert.*

Jun 7 *Feast of the Most Holy Trinity.*

Jun 9 *Sankadahara Chathurthi; SLTWG Drop In. Tel: 020 8542 3285.*

Jun 10 *Chariot Festival (Ther) of Sri Rajarajeeswary Amman Temple, Stoneleigh, Surrey, UK. Tel: 020 8393 8147.*

Jun 11 *Feast of St. Barnabas.*

Jun 13 *Feast of St. Padua.*

Jun 14 *Feast of the Sacred Heart of Lord Jesus.*

Jun 17 *Eekathasi.*

Jun 18 *Pirathosam; Karthigai.*

Jun 20 *Amavasai; Feast of St. Alban.*

Jun 23 *SLTWG Founder's Day Celebrations. Tel: 020 8542 3285.*

Jun 24 *Chathurthi; Feast of Nativity of St. John, the Baptist.*

Jun 26 *Shashti.*

Jun 27 *Aani Uththaram; SLTWG Refugee Week Celebrations. Tel: 020 8542 3285.*

Jun 30 *SLTWG Trip to Clacton Beach.*

At the Bhavan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HG. TEL: 020 7381 3086/4608.

Jun 7 to Jun 11 *7.30pm Lecture on Kriya Yoga by Swami Shuddhananda. All Welcome.*

Jun 16 & Jun 17 *11am to 1.00pm Lecture/Workshop on Indian Music & Dancing by Geeta Ramanujam. All Welcome.*

Jun 25 to Jun 28 *7 to 8.30pm Srimad Bhagavad Gita Lecture by Swami Parthasarathy. All Welcome.*

Australian Newsletter

The Tamil Senior Citizens' Association *held their Annual Cricket Match on 22nd March 2001. The two teams drawn from Senior Citizens played with great enthusiasm, watched by an enthusiastic crowd for a Challenge Trophy donated by Dr. & Mrs. A. Balasubramaniam in memory of Mrs. Balasubramaniam's late father, Senator S.R. Kanaganayagam. Mr. Samy Pasupati, President of the Association paid a tribute to the life and work of the late S. R. Kanaganayagam and Dr. Balasubramaniam presented the Challenge Trophy to the winning team.*

A concert in aid of Eelam Tamil Association *was held in Sydney on 14th April 2001. Two stars from South India – brothers Mohan and Rajesh Vaidya – presented a show which was a mix of film music and carnatic ragas. Rajesh Vaidya played the Veena and both of them thrilled the audience with their Tamil cinema songs. They were accompanied by an excellent band of local musicians. Local singers also took part giving the show a great variety. The hall was packed with all the tickets sold out and the concert raised a very large sum for the Eelam Tamil Association.*

The Revered Swami Dayananda Saraswati *paid a visit to Sydney in April 2001 much to the delight of his disciples and admirers. He gave a series of talks from April 23rd to 28th which was well attended. On 28th April, the Sydney branch of an organisation called AIMS (All India Movement for Seva) was launched. The movement headed by Swami Dayananda is supported by most of the Peetams and Mutts in India. This organisation aims to reach people in remote areas of India, especially the tribal people and bring them better health care, education, drinking water etc. Swami Dayananda feels that these people have been neglected by the Hindu organisations and as a result their poverty is driving them into the arms of alien faiths. The Chief Guest was Dr. Balasubramaniam, Chairman of the Hindu Council of Australia. He spoke on the aims and objectives of the Hindu Council of Australia, welcomed the formation of AIMS and called upon the Hindus in Sydney to support the movement financially. Swami Dayananda in his speech said that AIMS was already active in Tamil Nadu, Andhra and central states in North India. Members of the large audience were called upon to donate generously and they readily responded and thousands of dollars was collected on that day itself.*

An organisation called Anantha Nilayam *was formed a few years ago with the aim of setting up an International Memorial Cultural Centre by the Tamils of Sydney to encompass Tamils all over the world irrespective of religion, place of birth or nationality. It is envisaged that the centre would include a conference hall, a mini theatre and administrative office facilities. The centre would primarily be a 'Ninaivalayam' to honour and remember Tamils who had devoted their lives to promote and safeguard their land, language and culture. They could be categorised under such headings as Martyrs, Scholars, Journalists, Poets, Creative people, Spiritual leaders etc. Anantha Nilayam held a concert last year to raise funds and a meeting of interested people was held on 21st April. The live wire behind the project is Mrs. Meena Parameswaran. The office of Anantha Nilayam is functioning from her residence at 18 Rochester Street, Homebush, NSW 2140, Australia. She welcomes support, suggestions and contributions from well-wishers around the world.*

The Sydney Murugan Temple Second Maha Utsavam (Annual Festival) *was celebrated in a grand manner. The festival commenced on 28th March 2001 with the hoisting of the Holy Flag (Kodiaetram) and after the Chariot or Ther festival on 5th April concluded with Theertham and the lower*

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ing of the flag on 6th April. The Poonkavanam festival was celebrated on 7th April and drew a throng of devotees estimated to be well over 5000.

Unlike in our motherland, the festivals during the intervening period were allocated each day to different groups of suburbs of Sydney to enable all the devotees to participate in the festivals. The important flag hoisting, Chariot and Theertham festivals were conducted by the temple to make them common festivals for all.

One of the highlights of the festival was the Nathaswaram (Clarinet) and Thavil (Drums) music provided during the entire duration of the festival. Highly respected artistes were flown from India for this purpose.

Numerous devotees took time off from work for the entire festival period to ensure that the festivals were conducted successfully.

Kanaganayagams - A Reverential Reminiscence

Twelve years ago when a message from Sydney, Australia announced the peaceful passing away of Suppiah Kanaganayagam; District Judge Vigneswaran said: 'We have lost a very rare person, one in thousands'. It was only four days earlier, this great son of Sri Lanka who was in good health celebrated his 85th birthday. The Kanaganayagams were visiting their daughter and family Down Under following the destruction of the Jaffna Court House and its surroundings where Mr. Kanaganayagam held forte as a brilliant lawyer for over half a century. His wife Sakthiamma and he, a model couple in the best traditions of our culture, lived in this neighbourhood and raised their three children as responsible parents and civic conscious citizens.

Mr. Kanaganayagam was actively involved with the Jaffna Bar Association, Ramanathan Trust, Ramanathan Academy of Music, Hindu Board Orphanage, University of Jaffna and Tamil Congress. Endeared by friends, relatives and colleagues, the couple were sought after as genuine well-wishing elders at family and auspices events. Variously addressed as 'SR', 'Senator' and 'Ayah' he had his community's interest close to his heart. True to the name her parents blessed her with, his wife was his inspirational strength

Mr. Kanaganayagam's knowledge of law and of due process was remarkable. Wit was his supreme weapon; often in a difficult situation he would do a coup de maitre spiced with humour leaving witnesses and learned counsel in disarray. The chuckle of the court on such occasions would be obvious. He had a Shavian attribute of delivering home truths wrapped in witty ripostes, the funniest conveying the most poignant message. Paying his tribute, the Honourable Justice Siva Chelliah said his ready wit often enlivened court proceedings. He added: 'He was by reason of seniority, mature experience and daily involvement in the conduct of cases before the court was very much part and parcel of administration of law and justice in the Jaffna Peninsula'. In his interaction, there was a human touch; never hurt the feelings of clients, was kind and generous to juniors and encouraged young attorneys to develop their court craft. It was a delight to consult with him in his chambers and then to be in court concentrating on his contentions, the ease with which he presented them and the incisive humour that took the crush and chore out of dry and dreary proceedings. He had the knack of referring to obscure rulings including books, pages and columns with ease. Apart from his mastery of the civil law, SR was an expert on the Laws of Thesawalamai and Hindu Trust. Some of his cases were landmarks; two such were the Maruthady Pillayar Temple Case, which brought about a new understanding of temple trusts and the other the Vaddukoddai JDCSI Cathedral Church case on the civil rights of worship.

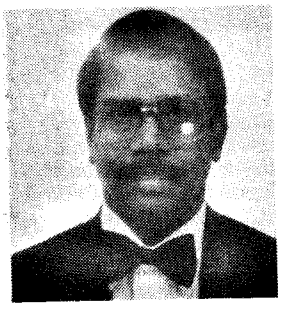
SR began his legal career in 1933 after formal education at Victoria College, Jaffna College and a teaching stint at Ananda College while training for his legal career at the Law College. A good academic and keen sportsman, he shone at soccer. His upbringing in the Valigamam West village of Sangarathai, Hindu faith and exposure to Buddhist and Christian traditions and the many friends he had in the Muslim community, his close association with the venerated guru and visionary Handy Peripanayagam and the pioneering involvement in the Jaffna Youth Congress made him a creative thinker and natural leader who harboured no prejudices that plagued peoples and communities.

He spent some time in the US as a Smith-Mundt scholar studying the workings of the American democracy. He served as a United National Party senator from 1949 to 1957, but with the party compromising on its nationalist ideals especially on the language issue, he joined the Tamil Congress, possibly more in expression of his opposition to forces of division that had bedevilled the country. Deeply drawn to children, whenever he visited the orphanage warmth and affection spontaneously flowed from him; the kids responded in kind and would swamp all over him. The needs of children were never shortchanged despite financial straits the orphanage often suffered for he had the wholehearted support of his wife. As much as they were to their own, they were the grandparents of the orphaned children as well. He was a pioneer in setting up the Ramanathan Music Academy, which today is on par with the best of its kind in India. Some of the Academy's graduates are pioneering gurus in countries the Tamils have made their homes during the last two decades.

Love, compassion and wisdom rooted in our souls sourced from the Supreme Being harmonised with the personal attributes of Ayah and Amma, and as the good judge said, they were rare gems and a blessing to many. Two years ago, Amma, the quintessence of the spirit of Sakthi, took her final bow leaving behind a lovely memory. She was a worthy example of a truly devoted wife to an equally devoted husband; together, they were great parents, kind kith and kin and good citizens.

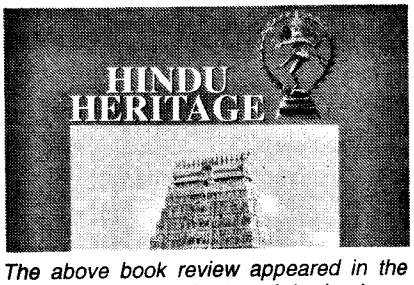
Victor Kaunairajan, Canada.

Congratulations to Dr. Arianayagam



Dr. Sakthiyakeerthy Arianayagam J.P., Hony. Secretary of the Medical Institute of Tamils and Chairman of the East London County Division of the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association has been appointed to the General Medical Council as a member of the Professional Conduct Committee and to the Commission for Health Impovement as an Assessor in Clinical Governance in the NHS. Our Congratulations!

Book Review of 'Hindu Heritage'



The above book review appeared in the last issue in April. Copies of the book are available at £15 from Western Jewellers, 230 Upper Tooting Road, London SW17 7EW. TEL: 020 8767 3445; FAX: 020 8767 3753.

The reviewer was Mr. S. Sriskandarajah, Solicitor. The omissions are regretted.

RUPINI'S BHARATHA NATYA ARANGETRAM

The Bharatha Natya Arangetram of Rupini daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Peripanathan of Lennard Road, London SE20 and disciple of Smt. Malathy Jayanayagam took place on 31st March 2001 at the Ashcroft Theatre, Croydon, which has witnessed many eastern cultural progammes by local students and eminent artistes from overseas.

Nirupan Perinpanathan welcomed the audience. The artistically produced programme carried the blessings of Yalpanam Mahawidvan Veeramani Iyer and his appeal to Goddess Vani Thai to help Rupini to dance along the sacred path was a solemn prayer. The repertoire was balanced and assured the audience of a reverent performance.

Rupini was fortunate to be assisted by two blending voices of Smt Sivasakthi Sivanesan and Selvi Yasoda Mithradas. The orchestra supported the blending 'Saareerams' ushering in musical upholds. Mirudangam was a great support to Rupini. Balachander produced the admirable intricate 'cholkattus' ushering the dancer's body movements and 'thalas' of feet. The mirudangam brought out vibrating encouragement of Rupini's performance. A sure boost!! The Veena Ghanam and Venu Ghanam was a rare but magnificent sober contribution. Smt Malini Thanabalasingamon on the Veena and Sri Pitchaiappah Gnanavaradan on the flute thrilled the audience and contributed to the success of the programme. Special mention must be made about Selvan Kumar Ragunathan on the violin – a promising young artiste who rendered a height to the title he embraces – 'Sangeeta Kala Jothi'.

Reverence filled the performance – Thodaya Mangalams was homage to 'Parampurisha' – Lord Krishna – His many incarnations (Avatharas). Jatheeswaram, in Ragamalika, choreographed by Rupini's Guru was a real treat. Varnam gave plenty of scope to the dancer to exhibit her sense of Sanchari Bhava, and Thala Pinnal. 'Ganam Isaithu Nindrayo' was a master production of the Guru and disciple.

After the interval 'Vadakayilayil Vaalum Easann' consisted of Thandava exhibition of Lord Nadarajah's wondrous dance which brought the world salvation destroying evils. The dancer exhibited Lord Nadarajah's 'Urthava Thandavas' performed in Kailaas and 'Ananda Thandavas' in Chidambaram. The Guru's deep knowledge of these exhibitions was well portrayed by Rupini.

The Keerthanam in Ragamalika choreographed by Rupini was a true contribution of the mother tongue she possesses. The parents and the South London Tamil School who are responsible for this knowledge have reaped the harvest. The Tamil school has added 'a feather to its cap'.

Nirupan, tutored by an eminent teacher Mrs. Malini Thanabalasingam contributed a musical interlude on the Veena. She is a product of the College of Carnatic Music, Madras and a senior disciple of Professor K.P. Sivanandan of Tanjavoor. She has many credits to her veena playing and that was portrayed in Nirupan's Veena playing! The Patham – Navarasa Nayaki composed by Veeramani Iyer, a true meritorious follower of Ambal has given Rupini a background to exhiibit the nine events in the life of Goddess Parvathi and shone the glory of her religious knowledge.

Thillana, the vigorous finish in the repertoire crowned the programme dedicated to Lord Krishna followed by Mangalam was a gratitude to the Gods, Guru, accompanying artistes and the audience.

Kumari Pramila Thavaraja, a product of the South London Tamil School, who has performed her Arangetram elucidated the items in English. Smt Anandarani Balendra's easy clear introduction in Tamil revealed her sound knowledge of art and language. Her mature ushering adorned the recital and added glory to the programme. 'Aum – Maha – Ganapathaya Namaha' ushered the Arangetram. Smt. Saraswathi Pakiraja graced the evening with her presence as Guest of Honour. Her blessings will surely help Rupini to go forward in this divine art. The Chief Guest Dr. Manjubashini Sivanathan crowned the programme with the deep and cultured speech on the art of which she had precise knowledge.

Salutations to devoted parents, Guru, disciple and the musicians from art lovers. A deep knowledge of religion, bhava, Thala and cultured episodes with the foundation in mother tongue reveals a memorable security to all.

Sincere blessings from

Damayanthi.

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S. K. Ganeshwaran - Appreciation

It is a year since S. K.Ganeshwaran, a great soul, generous to a fault left us for a nobler abode. It is hard to imagine that Ganesh, so full of spirit and good cheer, had left us so suddenly. To his large circle of friends, relatives, colleagues and neighbours, his demise was shocking as it was sudden. The crowds that thronged his home bore testimony to the esteem and reverence with which he was held by so many people from all walks of life.

My association began over forty years ago, when he entered the portals of Peradeniya University as a freshman in 1960. His batch mates would vouch for the fact that he had no foes; in fact he had qualities that were so sterling that he couldn't have made enemies: he was sincere, genuine in hard times, full of bonhomie in good times, supportive during examinations, concerned during ill health and over all honest in his dealings with fellowmen.

After his degree he joined Burah, Hathy and Co. as a trainee, passed out as a Chartered Accountant and subsequently became a partner in the same firm. He also had his own indenting firm Escaygee Syndicates, in addition to holding a management qualification. He also started the firm's Kurunegala Branch which he ran successfully. His colleagues would confirm that he was not only an intelligent and persevering officer but that he had sharp business acumen as well as an alert perception for innovative ventures.

He was very successful in life. However he was never ostentatious; he could have been flamboyant, for he was magnanimous in his gestures; to those who sought his assistance he was more than large hearted. He was simple and humble, never envious nor selfish – the hallmark of a true Hindu. He was trustee of the Kalikovil at Mutwal and he discharged his religious duties with integrity. He was a Foster Parent and donated funds to schools, temples and other charities. He looked after his wife and children with great commitment, and he spent two much deserved holidays in Australia with his only daughter who is happily married in Melbourne. All of us, who have been very close to him miss his fellowship dearly. Indeed if he made friends, his dedication to their cause was deep and honest. I am sure the good Lord has reserved a nobler place for him in his next birth.

Sivakurunathan.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by wife and children, brothers, sisters and their families - S. K. Parameswaran, 12 More Close, Purley, Surrey CR8 2JN. Tel: 020 8660 7747.

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